

Helping Friends and Family Help You After Loss of a Child *Pledge & Worksheet*

The Bereaved Parent's Pledge

1. I will survive. I'm not sure how but I will figure it out. Because as bad as it is now, it will never be as bad as getting the news or finding my child's body. If I can survive that, I can survive anything.
2. I the grieving parent/guardian/grandparent know that friends are afraid of saying the wrong thing but I'm going to understand that what others say, even if it's not perfect, comes from a place of love. If the situation were reversed, I might not know the right thing to say either.
3. I also understand that friends who have not suffered this loss have limitations. They don't understand fully and their capacity to sit with my pain will vary which is why I will seek additional support from a group, a counselor, retreat or a close friend because I am not meant to grieve alone.
4. I will help my friends, co-workers and family understand how to help me because they want to know and cannot read my mind.
5. I will respect where others of my family are in the grief process.
6. I understand that my pain and agonizing moments are building blocks to emotional healing. And getting "better" means accepting the loss and incorporating grief into my life in a way that we can live together and I can find joy again while also allowing my sadness be a bond to my loved one.
7. I will not allow someone else to [grief shame me](#) because they don't understand this kind of loss. I'm going to take a deep breath and explain so I can educate others. I have a right to visit a child's grave ten years after the death, talk about my deceased child as often as anyone else talks about their living ones, and I have a right to my tears. No one can erase my child from my family tree.

Healthy signs of coping and managing grief that friends and family often criticize

- A [shrine of sorts or collection of pictures in your home](#)
- Visits to the grave site or other memorial site even decades later
- Fundraisers and educational events
- Photo albums specifically made to commemorate the death
- Jewelry or clothing made with ashes and memorial ash container with the ashes in your home
- Pictures of the deceased when they are deceased that the bereaved may not share but friends and relatives may know have been taken.
- Frequent posts on social media with pictures. This is a way of working through it all with the support of extended loved ones and friends
- Talking about the child that dies long after he/she/they have died

Worksheet:

How Friends and Family Help Parents After Loss of a Child

Friends and family of a bereaved parent struggle with:

- **Wondering if they are enough.** Most everything feels unimportant at first when a parent has lost a child. To friends and family, the bereaved parents' problems seem so large compared to what they may be struggling with. It takes time for friends/family to start sharing with a bereaved parent again.
- **Whether to talk about the child or not.** Loved ones think they are "reminding" the parent of their loss or might make it worse.
- **Listening with empathy.** Friends and family are frustrated that they can't fix the pain or make things better.
- **Sitting with someone in their pain.** Sometimes a movie and the company of friends and family is enough but loved ones aren't sure of that.
- **Being uncomfortable.** A loss of this magnitude is overwhelming to everyone including friends, family and loved ones. Sitting with a bereaved parent feels awkward and uncomfortable and the fear of saying the wrong thing is paralyzing
- **Particular cultural grief practices.** These should be shared and discussed.

First, the grieving parent should decide which friend would be good to talk or confide in to relay your wishes. (Look for qualities of being open minded, empathetic, good communicators, and not gossipy or judgmental.)

Who are the possible friends you could share with? (You only need one. The other slots are backups.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The bereaved parent's wishes

Know that your friends and family can't read your mind. And while some want a house full after death of a child, others want more alone time. So you need to let your loved ones and co-workers know what you need.

Sometimes a husband wants something different than a wife so be sure to say which of these are also shared by a spouse. Keep in mind that fathers get less support from their friends and fewer are willing to listen to a man talk about losing a child. Men need support, too.

I/we need practical help with:

- Getting the news out to friends about _____ (death, funeral, fundraisers etc)
- How do I/we want news communicated? (text, social media, calls...)_____
- Carpooling

- Phone calls instead of texts (Indicate how you want this friend and others to communicate)
- Food. Everyday chores can be exhausting to complete. This is where your friends can help
- Planning a service
- Planning a fundraiser
- Help mowing the lawn
- Helping find resources for siblings
- Help find resources for parents who've lost a child (therapist, group, faith leader)
- Other practical things I need help with _____

Details

I/we want family and friends to know:

- I want to talk about my child
- I would love donations made to _____ in my child's name

- I want to be invited to parties even though I might cancel at the last minute if I'm having a hard day
- I do want others to say my child's name
- Ask me if I'm ready to discuss _____ (fill in the blank with sensitive topic)

Other things I want family and friends to know:

Things I **don't want to talk about right now (know that this can change over time):**

Things I **do** want to talk about right now (know that this can change over time):

I **don't** want to talk about my loss in these places: (this may change over time)

- Meetings with co-workers
- Client meetings
- Large gatherings
- Other _____

I **do** want to talk in these places (list places)

- Over coffee
- At Lunch
- Sometimes when I just need to talk in private
- Other _____

How do I want to answer questions like: ***“What happened?”*** or ***“How did [name] die?”*** (Good to have a set response prior to being asked.)

Review and brainstorm coping strategies for managing “difficult days”-

What coping skills might you utilize?

- Writing (blog posts, journal writing, music, poetry, letters to the deceased)
- Other creative expression/pursuits- artwork, drawing
- Exercise
- Listening to music, making music
- Mindfulness and breathing practices (Headspace App)
- Not OK app to check in with friends
- Talking about it
- Faith strategies
- Support groups or individual counseling
- Creating memorials like photo album, posting pictures on social media in remembrance
- Giving back

Things that mean a lot to bereaved parents:

- Stories about my child who died, especially written ones. ([Example of a project](#))

- Pictures of the deceased that the parents may not have
- Funds donated to causes in memory of the deceased
- Letters instead of standard-issue cards

Parents who have lost a child often suffer thoughts of suicide. Please reach out for help if you have these thoughts. Identify friends who are willing to listen to you and are your go-to when those thoughts are prevalent.

Suicide Hotlines- National & International

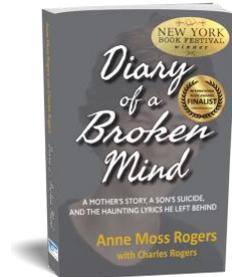
- USA Suicide hotline 1-800-273-8255
- [Crisis text line](#). Text HELP to 741-741
- Veteran's Services 1-800-273-8255, press 1
- Veteran's Text line send HELP to 838-255
- Crisis line for LGBTQ Youth 1-866-488-7386
- Crisis text line for LGBTQ Youth 678-678
- Canada 1-833-456-4566
- United Kingdom 116 123
- Australia 13 11 14
- [All international suicide hotlines](#)



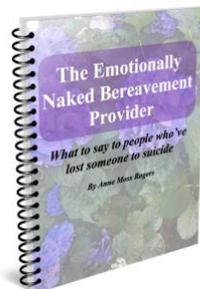
Free eBook- [Coping Strategies for Grief & Loss](#)



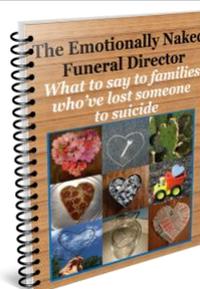
Free Grief Journey in a Jar Kit- [Once-a-day wisdom from a parent who knows the pain of losing a child](#)



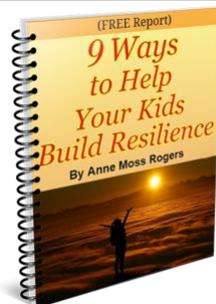
[Diary of a Broken Mind](#) – A 2020 New York Book Festival Winner



Free eBook- [The Emotionally Naked Funeral Director: What to say to someone to suicide](#)



Free eBook- [The Emotionally Naked Funeral Director: What to say to families who've lost someone to suicide](#)



Free eBook- [9 Things you can do to Help Kids Learn Coping Skills for Resilience](#)