



# FRIENDS + FAMILY

## SAY THIS...

- + “I am so sorry for your loss.” *Always acknowledge a loss. Never hide from it.*
- + “I love you and I am here for you.”
- + “I thought of **(NAME)** today.” *Say the baby’s name, and don’t be afraid to bring it up and on your own.*
- + “I wish I could take this pain from you.”
- + “I will always remember **(NAME)** and will never forget **(HIS/HER)** life.”
- + “**(NAME)** had your beautiful (eyes, hair, feet, etc.)”
- + “I miss **(HIM/HER)** so much, and I wish **(HE/SHE)** was here.”
- + “You are an incredible mom/dad.” *This is always present tense, regardless of the presence of living children.*
- + “Your grief is intense because your love is too.” *Grief mirrors the magnitude of love.*
- + “I am so sorry this is your story.”
- + “Thank you for sharing **(HIS/HER)** (story, picture, memory, etc.) with me.” *Consider it an honor when invited into someone’s loss.*
- + “How can I support you through (today, this anniversary, your due date, **(NAME’S)** birthday, etc.)?”
- + “How is your heart today?” *This is a much better option than “How are you doing?” which can be tricky to answer.*
- + “Do you want to talk?” *They may not want to, but offer a listening ear regardless.*
- + “Do you want to go (scream, cry, process, break something, work out, etc.)?” *Be a buddy for what they need right now. Tomorrow could look different—be a buddy for that too.*
- + “It breaks my heart to see you suffering. I wish I could take this away.”

## WHAT TO SAY, WHAT NOT TO SAY

Dear Friend,

Sometimes, the best advice comes in the most basic forms. This document provides a simple guide on how to love and support bereaved parents in the difficult days and years following pregnancy or infant loss.

This guide was born from the personal experiences of loss-parents and the many challenges they have faced in their loss journeys. However, it’s important to remember that no advice is absolute for those in the throes of grief. Grief is deeply personal—like a fingerprint—and is **UNIQUE** to each individual. It ebbs, flows, changes, and defies consistency. Along with this advice, it’s crucial to tailor your care to fit the unique mold of the loved one you are supporting.

Some of these tips may seem obvious, while others could surprise you. But rest assured, every word is meaningful and written with intent. If we took the time to include it here, it is because a loss-mom or loss-dad experienced it, and that alone makes it valid.

As you move forward, tread with compassion in your steps and tact in your words. A grieving parent’s heart is exceptionally delicate and needs to be handled with care. Your goal as a support person is not to remove their pain—but to **REDUCE THEIR SUFFERING**. As counterproductive as it may feel, try to let the meaning of those words sink in. Your goal is not to get your loved one “back to normal” but to support them as they discover and learn how to adjust to the new cadence (or normal) they will eventually find.

You don’t have the power to fix the unfixable—**NONE** of us do. That can be impossibly hard to accept, especially when someone we love is hurting so badly. However, while you may not be able to help your loved one overcome their grief, you can walk beside them through it.

Remember, perfection is not attainable—so don’t set your standards that high. Just take small steps (like reading this guide), and you will be well on your way to becoming a pillar of support for years to come. On behalf of the loved one you are reading this for—thank you.

Much Love,

Jamie Stewart  
WWM Cofounder and Executive Director



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## SAY THIS...(continued)

- + “The (sunset, flower, song, etc.) I saw today made me think of **(NAME)**.”
- + “I wonder what **(NAME)** is (doing, seeing, experiencing) in heaven right now?”
- + “I think **(NAME)** would have loved (sunflowers, pizza, unicorns, superman, etc.)”
- + “I did \_\_\_\_\_ in honor of **(NAME)** today.”
- + “Your love for **(NAME)** is so beautiful.”
- + “This isn’t fair / This is not okay / This sucks.”  
*It’s okay (and appropriate) to acknowledge the heartbreak of their story.*
- + “I can’t take this pain away, but I will be here to carry the weight of it with you.”
- + “This is not your fault.”
- + “You ARE a mother/father.”  
*Even if the family has no living children.*
- + “I know I don’t understand your pain, but I love you and will support you in whatever way(s) you need.”
- + “I’m dropping dinner off outside your door on **(DATE)**. Is that okay?” / “Can I stop by today and grab you kids for a couple of hours?” / “I’m at the grocery store. What can I grab you?” *These all work much better than “How can I help?”*

## PLEASE DON'T SAY...

- “At least. . .” ANY sentence beginning with “at least” as it justifies the loss. (Ex: “At least you weren’t further along.” / “At least you can always have another.” / “At least it wasn’t an older child.” / “At least you still have \_\_\_\_\_ kids.” / “At least you are young.” / “At least **(HE/SHE)** didn’t suffer.” / “At least you didn’t have time to get attached.” / “At least **(NAME)** is no longer hurting.”)
- “Everything happens for a reason.”
- “How are you doing?” This is well-meaning but impossible to answer. Always default to “How’s your heart today?”
- “**(HE/SHE)** is in a better place now.” / “Heaven just needed another angel.” / “**(HE/SHE)** was too beautiful for Earth.” / “This was God’s plan.” These are typically not helpful, even for a religious person.
- “I’m here if you need anything.” Most people will not reach out when in need. Everyone says this; few follow through.
- “What can I do for you? How can I help?” This is too open-ended. Offer (but don’t force) specific things to help (babysitting, a meal, helping with an errand, etc.).
- “I just can’t imagine.” Yes, you can—you just don’t want to.
- “I understand what you are going through.” Don’t compare losses, stories, or pain. Unless it’s yours, you don’t understand it.
- “Death is just a natural part of life.” Death may be an inevitable part of life, but the collateral of it is anything but natural.
- “This will make you stronger.” This is survival mode for the family—not weightlifting. Very rarely do parents feel “stronger” from trauma.
- “You need/have to move on.” Loss is something to move through, not on from. This is a loss they will never “get over.” Never put a timeline on it.
- “I don’t know how you are doing this—I could never do it.”  
*They didn’t have a choice.*
- “Just have some faith.” The presence of grief is not the absence of faith.
- “Something good will come out of this.” From their perspective, the cost of that “good” was far too high.
- “Time heals all wounds.” Time doesn’t heal all wounds (especially ones of this nature). Time simply acclimates us to loss.
- “If you could just let it go, you could start living again.”
- “Be thankful for what you DO have.” Being thankful for what they have and mourning what they don’t isn’t wrong. This is especially true for the death of a twin.
- “You should. . .” Be careful with these statements. They can promote shame and hint that the bereaved is doing it wrong. Don’t “should” all over them.



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## WHAT TO DO, WHAT NOT TO DO

This guide was born from the personal experiences of our team and the many challenges they have faced in their pregnancy and infant loss journeys. However, it's important to remember that no advice is absolute for those in the trials of grief. Along with this advice, it's crucial to tailor your care to fit the unique mold of the person you are supporting.

### PLEASE DO...

- + **Check in and do it often.** *And not just initially—this is a lifelong loss.*
- + **Validate their grief and their sorrow regularly.**
- + **Normalize their grief.** *It is a part of life and something to embrace and accept.*
- + **Check-in on the father/partner.**  
*Ask him how their heart is. It seems obvious, but dads/partners are very often completely forgotten.*
- + **Give a memorial gift with the baby's name or in honor of the baby** (jewelry, key chain, plant a tree, name a star, etc.).
- + **Make meals, send gift cards, or have food delivered.**  
*Consider starting a food train and organize the option of a “no contact” drop-off.*
- + **Practical things to help** (clean house, do laundry, watch kids, etc.). *More intimate help should come from more intimate friendships/relationships.*
- + **Bring up the child's name on your own.** *This will not “remind” them they died; rather, it will remind them their baby lived and has not been forgotten.*
- + **Acknowledge the baby's absence on holidays yearly** (especially Mother's Day, Father's Day, Christmas, and Thanksgiving). *Do this EVERY YEAR.*
- + **Include the baby in the “kid count.”** *This is the family's total children, total grandkids, etc. “I have 7 grandchildren.”*
- + **Ask to see pictures of the baby.** *However, don't be offended if they are not comfortable sharing. Every parent is different in their comfort level with this.*
- + **Celebrate their child's life with them for as long as they ask you to.** *Do this REGARDLESS of the passage of time. You may not understand this need, but you need to embrace it.*
- + **Remember birthdays, anniversaries, and any other important dates.** *Put these in your calendar INDEFINITELY.*
- + **Lower/change your expectations of the family** (especially at first).
- + **Give grace if they don't want to be social.**
- + **Continue to reach out to them even if they don't always respond to you.** *Your support is noted and appreciated even if they don't respond.*
- + **If applicable, reach out to what would have been Mom's due date** (this is a day that is often forgotten).
- + **Support/encourage new friendships and relationships with other bereaved parents.** *For some, it can be hard to see intimate connections with new friends forming, but these friendships are vital to their emotional and mental health.*
- + **Understand that your relationship with them might change.** *The music of your relationship hasn't stopped—the song has just changed.*
- + **Understand that they will not be the exact same person as before.** *It is impossible for loss not to change them.*
- + **Vent, complain, and pour the COLLATERAL of your grief into OTHER PEOPLE.** *The bereaved family cannot carry the full impact of your grief as well as their own. Your struggles matter too, but they should be directed somewhere else. This is the difference between saying, “I'm really missing my niece today” (which is okay) vs. “I'm upset that you have neglected our friendship lately” (which is not okay).*
- + **Have thick skin and a soft heart.** *Practice compassion and empathy while not being easily offended.*
- + **Have the awkward conversation and embrace the tension.** *If there is a difficulty (i.e., a pregnant family member, a newborn niece/nephew, an upcoming baby shower, etc.), bring it out into the open and follow their lead on how to move forward. Do NOT avoid or hide these topics*
- + **Sit with them in silence.** *This may feel counterproductive, but sometimes your presence is far more important than your words.*
- + **Go to events in honor of their child** (a birthday party, a fundraiser, etc.). *If they invite you, PLEASE make it a priority!*
- + **Support every decision, even if you may not understand it.** *They now view the world through a new set of eyes few understand. You don't need to UNDERSTAND them; you just need to LOVE them.*
- + **Allow them to live in the “Land of And” where often two opposite feelings or emotions can coexist. . . Joy AND sorrow, laughing AND crying, enjoying their life AND longing for a different reality, loving and cherishing living children AND aching for a life that included their baby, being mad at God AND believing He is still sovereign.**



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## WHAT TO DO, WHAT NOT TO DO

### PLEASE DON'T...

- **Ignore the obvious or pretend nothing has happened.** There is nothing worse than “sweeping it under the rug.”
- **Bristle at the baby’s name being brought up or quickly change the subject.** This IS noticed.
- **Try to minimize their story by telling one of your own.** (“Oh, I had a miscarriage once”... “My friend lost a baby too,” etc.). Loss should NEVER be compared.
- **Tell them how their grief/loss has negatively affected you.** That information only puts more weight on their shoulders. Your feelings need to be heard—just by others’ ears.
- **Justify or rationalize their loss in ANY way.** Circumstance, gestation, or age do not matter. The loss of a child is a GREAT loss.
- **Try to fix something that is unfixable.** This loss cannot be fixed. It can only be carried.
- **Say you want to help and never do anything.** If you promise to help, follow through.
- **Rush the process.** This takes years—yes—YEARS. Rushing the process ONLY brings shame that they are doing it “wrong.” Honoring and tending to their grief is a new part of who they are, and it will change and evolve regularly for the rest of their lives.
- **Put a timeline on their grief.** There is no “correct” timeline when it comes to healing.
- **Expect them to enjoy normal things, resume normal activities, hobbies, etc.** Give them time to get back to the things they used to love. Moving forward, these things could change.
- **Compare losses.** This is ESPECIALLY true if you have never lost a baby at a similar gestation/age.
- **Use religious platitudes.** These are well-meaning but not always comforting. Yes, even for those who are religious.



- **“Overspiritualize” their loss.** It’s okay to separate faith and humanity. They are allowed to feel every single emotion they need to.
- **Be upset if they don’t want to go to an event.** A BBQ, a friend’s baby shower, a niece’s first birthday—some things they may not have the energy for, and some, may be triggering. When those events are approaching, ask them how their heart is feeling and if they want to go. They don’t need permission to skip an event, but give it anyway.
- **Exclude them.** Continue to offer invitations without expectations. And yes, continue to do so even if they continue to say no.
- **Expect them to be who they were before the loss.** This will change them, and it will take a long time for them to figure out who they are becoming.
- **Pressure them to feel/act a certain way.** Follow their lead and mimic their emotions. If they are sad, be sad with them. If they are mad, be mad with them.
- **Expect them to stop thinking about and talking about their loss.** Most likely, a time will come where they may feel like people are tired of listening. Allow them to talk—be that safe place for them.
- **Take their grief personally.** It may feel like what they are saying/doing or how they are acting is about you, but many times it’s not.
- **Hint that their grief is getting “unhealthy.”** Grief is not a sickness and should never be treated as such. Always, however, get professional help if unhealthy coping mechanisms are apparent.
- **Use this time to air past grievances.** Remember, grief shines a light on many issues and magnifies EVERYONE’S emotions. Always offer lots and lots of grace.
- **Hide a new pregnancy.** This is uncomfortable for everyone, but avoiding it is worse. Find a private time and wrap your news with tact and love.