How Can I Help? Can I Help?

Several things make grief difficult to deal with - there is no time line, it is very personal and there is no telling what may trigger sad and painful feelings. Further, grief becomes different as individuals walk along its rocky and difficult path. The individuality of grief and where a person is along that path makes it difficult to know exactly how to aid someone attempting to heal. Another factor that can impede helping someone is our own inhibitions in not knowing how to approach a grieving person. It may be easier for us to ignore this grieving person, a mumbled "Hello", no eye contact and then to get on with our own lives. It is hoped that the following will assist you when you come into contact with someone who has suffered a loss.

Note: “Loss” can be defined as any major loss - e.g. loss of employment, house fire, divorce, as well as bereavement, although this Fact Sheet deals with loss by death.

1. Do step forward, approach the individual, put out your hand or offer them a hug, if the situation is appropriate. Make eye contact and say, "I am so sorry!" Often that will be enough to allow the person to speak of their pain.

2. Be a good listener. This rule applies in so many areas of our lives and is extremely important when listening to a bereaved person. Don't add to their situation by recounting horror stories of your own. This is the time to Listen, to perhaps once again say, “I am so sorry” or, “It isn't fair”. Don't take up this time with yourself but give freely of your listening skills. Don't be afraid to use the deceased's name. This validates their existence. If you don't know the deceased's name, don't be afraid to ask – “What did you name your Baby?” Families need to speak of their lost one.

3. Be prepared to make yourself available. Make sure you don't give the impression of "hurrying" them or speeding them along because you need to be elsewhere or because you feel uncomfortable.

4. Try to accept the words shared with you. This individual in grief may be railing against G-d, life, the world. Don't make harsh judgements. Just accept the words as they come. In an effort to get “rid” of our pain it is not unusual to make rash and/or harsh statements.

5. There are many concrete ways in which one can assist - take care of other children for a while, bring over a meal, send a card, attend the wake and/or funeral, make a cup of tea. Ask how you can help.

6. Don't minimize the loss – “You can have more children.” “It’s better this way, your baby was sick.” “At least he is in a better place”. “God needed her more than you did.” It is not unusual for the individual to have, in their minds, already walked their child, bathed him, held and rocked him. Children are not interchangeable and to imply so will only make the grief worse. Families who have survivors of multiple birth children are often not given proper space to grieve their loss as they do have survivors. Minimizing their loss does not help!

7. Don't forget to acknowledge the father's grief. Too often the mothers are consoled while Dad is expected to “Hang tough”. He, too, has experienced the death of a child and also experiences very real feelings of loss and pain. He has the added burden of society's expectations that he can “cope”. He may be split between a child(ren) at home, baby in NICU, his job, planning a funeral, his wife recovering from a c-section and will also need your support.

8. There are no shortcuts through grieving. Any attempt at shortcuts can only make things worse. Try and allow the bereaved individual as long or as short a period as they need. Be patient. Avoid telling the person how they “should” feel or act or what they “should” do to make things easier. Avoid saying, “You are
Grief-How Can I Help?

Additional Resources
- *Holidays & Grief!, Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheet series*
- *How Can You Help Yourself? Dealing with Grief, Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheet series*
- *Loss of One, More or All Babies, Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheet series*
- *Loss and Grief: Statement of Rights, Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheet series*
- *Suggestions for Widows/Widowers, Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheet series*
- *Talking With Your Children About Death, Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheet series*
- Visit our [website](http://www.multiplebirthscanada.org) for a full listing of our Fact Sheets.

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Loss Support Network
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