



# Made Known

## FAMILY PAMPHLET

### GRANDPARENTS & EXTENDED FAMILY

#### **There Was a Time**

- Unknown Author

There was a time when I could make it all better.  
That time is no more.  
I could kiss your hurts  
And mend them in an instant.  
I could wipe your tears  
And see your beautiful smile return to your face.  
And when your hopes were dashed  
I could help you find a reason not to give up.  
But that was when  
The world only knew you as a fresh young rose.  
That was when  
Life was sweet  
And the worst thing that ever  
Happened was  
A broken heart,  
From the boy next door.  
There was a time  
when I could make it all better.  
That time is no more.

“We hurt twice. We hurt for the children because they are our children. Plus, we hurt for the grandchild we lost.”  
– A grandmother

#### **GRIEF**

It is difficult to see your loved one grieving, especially when you are dealing with a loss of your own—the loss of your grandchild, niece or nephew. When your child, sibling or close family member loses a child, you—as their family—are often their greatest support system. It’s important for you to recognize and face your own grief so you are able to care for the grieving parent.

Allow yourself to cry and cry hard. Your grief is valid. But be mindful of the grief you show while in the presence of the grieving parent. It is important for your grieving loved one to know the loss affects you, but if you are expressing more anguish publicly than they are, they might feel the need to help take care of you. Try to express the fullness of your grief outside of their presence—to create your own support system.

**Find someone to talk to.** Another grandparent, aunt or uncle who has lost a baby, a caring friend, a counselor.

**Write your feelings in a journal.** This is a safe place to express the rawness and honesty you can't—and likely shouldn't—around your grieving loved one.

**Get plenty of sleep.** Grief is both emotionally and physically exhausting.

**Exercise.** This will release the stress grief builds and make you more capable of lending a helping hand.

**Read about grief.** This will help you face your own grief as well as support your loved one in theirs.

## CARING FOR YOUR LOVED ONE

When you're caring for your loved one as they grieve, the words you don't say matter just as much as the words you do.

### DON'T SAY:

- » “Maybe next time you'll take better care of yourself.” *(The mother already blames herself for the loss. Criticizing her behaviors while pregnant will only complicate her sorrow.)*
- » “It won't happen again.” *(As much as you want to fix things, you cannot know this for sure.)*
- » “You can have another baby.” *(Parents will always mourn this baby. One baby does not replace another.)*
- » “You have an angel in Heaven.” *(Parents don't want an angel. They want their baby.)*
- » “Don't dwell. Just put it behind you.” *(This sounds like you are making light of the loss.)*
- » “God has a plan.” or “There's a reason for everything.” *(This can incite anger. No plan or reason brings comfort to a grieving parent.)*
- » “Call me if you need anything.” *(Grieving parents seldom reach out. State a specific time you will check in and then do so.)*
- » “Just get up and get busy” *(It's more important to be present in grief than it is to tell parents what is next or what they need to do.)*

### DO SAY:

- » “I'm sorry.” *(Being vulnerable enough to not offer a solution says you recognize the depth of their loss.)*
- » “What can I do for you right now?” *(Provide a tangible option such as: “I just blew the leaves off my roof. How about I load up the blower and get your roof while I'm at it?” or “I'm headed to the grocery store. Do you need toilet paper? Milk? Anything?”)*
- » “I'm here. I want to listen.” *(Being physically present speaks volumes. Don't be afraid of silence.)*
- » “What do you miss about (child) today?” *(A specific question can be better than a simple “How are you?”)*
- » “This must be hard for you.” *(Acknowledge and validate your loved one's emotions.)*
- » “I don't know what to say.” *(It's okay to admit when you are at a loss for words. It opens the door for the parents to share their feelings.)*
- » “May we pray together?” *(Be ready for them to say no and let it go.)*

As a close family member, there are practical ways only you can help. Some of those include:

Offer to stay at the hospital.

Take pictures but let your loved one decide if and when they want to see them.

Offer to make calls to other relatives and friends.

Save keepsakes such as flowers sent by friends to make a memento they can keep.

Prepare favorite meals.

Care for and include their other children.

Offer to plan a memorial service.

Help financially (*with hospital bills, funeral arrangements, psychological care, etc.*).

Understand when the grieving parent needs distance from other newborns or pregnant friends/relatives (*Many families have multiple members having children in the same years. Don't take it personally if celebrating a birth in the family is too difficult for a while.*).

Other practical things you can do:

Listen

Cry with them

Household chores (*laundry, dishes, cooking, etc*)

Transporting (*kids, family, errands*)

Take out trash

Bring meals

Sit in silence

Massage shoulders (*grief comes with physical pain*)

Hold a hand, touch a shoulder or give a hug

Continue supporting your loved one's grief (*There's no time limit to grief, and it could take some time before the parent feels "normal" again. That's not to say you will be doing their dishes for two years. Simply be willing to talk about the loss and acknowledge that it's normal to still be affected months and years later.*)

## TALKING WITH FRIENDS

You have likely already told a few friends about the exciting news of your loved one's pregnancy or the birth of the baby. Now you have to update them with the difficult news of your family's loss.

The reaction you get from friends may vary greatly. Notice the friends who support you and encourage you to talk about it. These people will be a great source of comfort as you and your other family members process your sorrow.

You may be surprised or feel hurt when others—especially those from older generations—seem shocked by your tears or the fact that your loved one, in the case of a miscarriage, named the baby, took pictures or had a memorial service. In years past, infant loss was a non-event. It was believed that the sooner one moves on, the better life would be. Use these times as opportunities to explain to your friends that facing grief has proven to be more beneficial. Try to be patient in coaching them on what you need. You may be providing them with information that will help them deal with their own grief in the future.

## REMEMBERING

For many bereaved parents, their biggest fear is being the only one who remembers their son or daughter in the upcoming months and years. One of the greatest gifts you can give your loved one is simply committing to remember their child. Here are a few practical ways to show you remember:

- » Attend the memorial service.
- » Call the child by name.
- » Include the baby in conversation or prayers at family gatherings.
- » When others ask how many grandchildren/nieces/nephews you have, include the baby in the total.

- » Create a calendar reminder (for significant days such as the anniversary of the loss, or the baby's due date or birth date).
- » Check in on holidays (Mother's Day and Father's Day can be particularly difficult).

### **Books**

Different family dynamics make it impossible to cover everything in a short pamphlet. Here are a few great resources for further information on the healthiest ways to approach this loss as a family:

*A Grandparent's Sorrow* by Pat Schwiebert

*A Silent Sorrow* by Ingrid Kohn and Perry-Lynn Moffitt

*When a Baby Dies* by Rana K. Limbo and Sara Rich Wheeler

*Empty Cradle, Broken Heart* by Deborah L. Davis, Ph.D.

### **Suggested Information**

<http://www.northsidepnl.com/for-family--friends.html>