

Helpful **OR** Hurtful?

An activity to raise awareness on what might be considered helpful or hurtful when interacting with suffering families.

DIRECTIONS: Read each statement below. Put a + next to the statements that a suffering family might find helpful and a - next to the ones that might be considered hurtful.

- ____ 1. At least you have other kids.
- ____ 2. There was probably something wrong with the baby.
- ____ 3. Do you want to talk about it? I'm here to listen.
- ____ 4. I'm so sorry for your loss.
- ____ 5. Maybe God is punishing you for _____.
- ____ 6. Do you think you could have exercised too much?
- ____ 7. I'd love to lighten some of your daily responsibilities by bringing you a meal. Do you have any allergies I should know about?
- ____ 8. Don't worry, you'll get pregnant again.
- ____ 9. Did you choose a name for your baby? I would be honored to intentionally speak his or her name to honor his/her life.
- ____ 10. I know how you feel. My fur baby passed away.
- ____ 11. I know there's nothing I can say to fix this, so I want you to know I'm here to sit and cry with you.
- ____ 12. God needed another angel.
- ____ 13. God doesn't give us more than we can handle.
- ____ 14. Everything happens for a reason.
- ____ 15. I'm sorry. I wish there was something I could do to erase your pain.
- ____ 16. I know grief comes in waves. It isn't linear. How are you navigating it nowadays? How can I be praying for you?
- ____ 17. You can always adopt.

Helpful Things to Say to a family in suffering

Helpful replies from the flipside:

3, 4, 7, 9, 11, 15, 16

Do hold space for their unique circumstances. Resist the urge to find common ground by comparing their circumstances to something you have experienced. **Avoid** phrases that diminish or minimize their suffering like “At least...”

Do allow them the freedom to feel grief and to do so on their timeline. Though it might make you uncomfortable, lament is actually encouraged in the Bible. **Avoid** encouraging them to look at the bright side.

Do see them and do show up. Even if you say nothing, even if you just cry or offer a hug, showing up means so much to a suffering family—so much so they never forget who showed up in their darkest moments. **Avoid** avoiding them. People are perceptive when you avoid eye contact, walk a different way, or stay busy so you don’t have to engage.

Do actively listen. Listen not to respond, but rather listen to understand. **Avoid** making judgements, trying to problem solve why this happened, or trying to fix them or their circumstances. Doing so could imply guilt which could be very hurtful. *And remember, Job’s friends did great when they just sat with him and did not speak.*

Do speak simply. Less is often more. A simple, “I’m so sorry. It’s not supposed to be like this,” validates their pain and expresses your empathy. **Avoid** empty promises and trite platitudes.

Do pray. Interceding for this family is a meaningful gift you can give them. Whether you ask if you can pray for them right then and there or you pray for them in private, do it!

**You can pray a simple one that you memorize.*

Do say their child’s name. This is a beautiful way to honor their child and validate his or her existence. **Avoid** being fearful that you’ll remind the family of their grief. They have not forgotten nor will they ever forget.

*Sample Prayer:

Lord, our hearts feel crushed by the unimaginable loss of [insert name]. Your word says you are near to the brokenhearted and you save those who are crushed in spirit. I thank you for your nearness to [The -- Family] and the personal ways in which you will comfort and provide for them in the days ahead.