

For Your Friends

When friends ask how they can help, you might want to give them a copy of this section.

When there has been a death of a loved one by suicide, survivors will experience a depth and range of feelings. It is important to honor and respect the needs of the survivors in the days, weeks and months following the suicide. Often you may feel helpless. These guidelines help you understand what may be comforting to the family. However, before you assume responsibilities, we believe it's important to ask survivors whether they need your help. Some survivors gain added strength from performing many of the responsibilities below, while others may want to rely on friends or family for support and guidance.

Since recently bereaved people may have trouble concentrating or making decisions, instead of simply asking "How can I help?" you might try asking if you can help with specific tasks, like babysitting, dog walking, grocery shopping, cleaning the house, watering the lawn, or organizing paperwork.

- Respond honestly to questions asked by the family. You don't need to answer more than asked.
- If they want to know more, they will ask later.
- Surround them with as much love and understanding as you can.
- Give them some private time. Be there, but don't smother them.
- Show love, not control.
- Let them talk. Most of the time they just need to hear out loud what is going on inside their heads. They usually aren't seeking advice.
- Encourage the idea that decisions be made by the family together.
- Expect that they will become tired easily. Grieving is hard work.
- Let them decide what they are ready for. Offer your ideas but let them decide themselves.

- Keep a list of phone calls, visitors and people who bring food and gifts.
- Offer to make calls to people they wish to notify.
- Keep the mail straight. Keep track of bills, cards, newspaper notices, etc.
- Help with errands.
- Keep a list of medication administered.
- Offer to help with documentation needed by the insurance company, such as a copy of the death certificate.
- Give special attention to members of the family — at the funeral and in the months to come.
- Allow them to express as much grief as they are feeling at the moment and are willing to share.
- Allow them to talk about the special endearing qualities of the loved one they have lost.

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Here are two other thoughts:

- Write down a story about their loved one (especially one that they might not know themselves) and give it to them, so that they can read it when they're ready.
- Don't be afraid to say their loved one's name. Don't worry about making them cry; it hurts so much more when no one talks about the person they lost.