



Supporting Bereaved Families

Guidance for Providers and Staff



The death of a child is one of the most devastating experiences a family can face. As care providers, our role is to support families with compassion and clarity while honoring the depth of their grief. Use these points as guidelines to respond with competence, empathy, and respect in moments of profound loss.

1. Be Present and Listen with Compassion

Offer your full attention and let parents speak freely, whether they're silent, angry, overwhelmed, or tearful. You don't need to solve anything – being there and fully present is enough.

Say: "I'm here with you." / "You don't need to explain. Whatever you're feeling is okay." / "Take your time. I'm not going anywhere."

2. Communicate Clearly and Gently

Speak honestly and simply to allow time for the information to settle. Use phrases like "passed away" or "died" instead of "they've moved on" or "gone to sleep."

Say: "I know this is incredibly painful. I'll stay here and answer any questions you have." / "Would it help if I explained what happened again?"

3. Validate Grief and Respect Individual Reactions

Grief looks different for everyone. Parents may express shock, guilt, anger, or silence. These responses are all normal.

Say: "Everything you're feeling right now is completely valid." / "There's no one way to do this." / "You don't have to be okay right now."

4. Respect Cultural and Spiritual Practices

Families may want to observe specific rituals or draw on spiritual traditions. Make space for these practices when possible.

Say: "Are there any spiritual or cultural customs you'd like us to honor?"

5. Support the Entire Family

Recognize that grief affects more than just the parents. Siblings, grandparents, and other loved ones may need care and attention too.

Say: "How are your other children doing?" / "Would it be helpful to have resources for siblings?" / "It's okay if different people in the family are grieving in different ways."

6. Offer Practical Help and Gentle Guidance

In the fog of grief, everyday decisions can feel overwhelming. Offer help when it feels appropriate.

Say: "Would you like help figuring out what comes next?" / "We can take things one step at a time." / "Is there someone I can call for you?"

7. Refer to Additional Support When Needed

There are plenty of support services available. Connect families with professional resources such as social workers, chaplains, or bereavement specialists.

Say: "There are people on our team who can help with this kind of loss. Would you like me to connect you?" / "I want to make sure you have the right support."

8. Set Compassionate Boundaries

Be kind and engaged, but also aware of your own emotional capacity. It is okay to ask for help and share the responsibility with your team.

Say to the family (if appropriate): "I care deeply, and I want to make sure you have the support you need. Someone from our team will stay close by."

9. Be Mindful of Nonverbal Cues

Sometimes, silence and presence communicate more than words. A calm voice, soft posture, or simply sitting nearby can help ground grieving parents.

Do: Sit down, stay still, offer a tissue, or meet their eyes if welcomed.

10. Create Space for Meaning, If Welcomed

Families may want to mark this moment in a personal way. Support this gently, without directing or assuming.

Say: "Is there something you'd like to say or do before we move forward?" / "Would you like to spend a few more moments together?" / "We can support whatever feels meaningful to you."

Bereaved parents and families can access funeral home listings and grief support resources on our website. Ensure they have received the CHKD Bereaved Family card with the QR code to lead them to the webpage.

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