

HELPING BEREAVED PARENTS

DO'S

- ◆ Do let your genuine concern and caring show.
- ◆ Do be available ... to listen, to run errands, to help with the other children or whatever else seems needed at the time.
- ◆ Do say you are sorry about what happened to their child and about their pain.
- ◆ Do allow them to express as much grief as they are feeling at the moment and are willing to share.
- ◆ Do encourage them to be patient with themselves, not to expect too much of themselves and not to impose any “shoulds” on themselves.
- ◆ Do allow them to talk about the child they have lost as much and as often as they want.
- ◆ Do talk about the special, endearing qualities of the child they've lost.
- ◆ Do give special attention to the child's brothers and sisters - at the funeral and in the months to come (they too are hurt and confused and in need of attention which their parents may not be able to give at this time).
- ◆ Do reassure them that they did everything that they could, that the medical care their child received was the best or whatever else you know to be true and positive about the care given their child.

DON'TS

- ◆ Don't let your own sense of helplessness keep you away from reaching out to a bereaved parent.
- ◆ Don't avoid them because you are uncomfortable (being avoided by friends adds pain to an already intolerably painful experience).
- ◆ Don't say you know how they feel (unless you've lost a child yourself you probably don't know how they feel).
- ◆ Don't say “you ought to be feeling better by now” or anything else which implies a judgment about their feelings.
- ◆ Don't tell them what they should feel or do.
- ◆ Don't change the subject when they mention their dead child.
- ◆ Don't avoid mentioning the child's name out of fear of reminding them of their pain (they haven't forgotten it).
- ◆ Don't try to find something positive (e.g. a moral lesson, closer family ties, etc.) about the child's death.
- ◆ Don't point out that at least they have their other children (children are not interchangeable; they can not replace each other).
- ◆ Don't say that they can always have another child (even if they wanted to and could, another child would not replace the child that has died).
- ◆ Don't suggest that they should be grateful for their other children (grief over the loss of one child does not discount parent's love and appreciation of their living children).
- ◆ Don't make comments which in any way suggest that the care given their child at home, in the emergency room, hospital, or wherever as inadequate (parents are plagued by feelings of doubt and guilt without any help from their family and friends)