



How to Help a Grieving Parent During the Holidays

by Gary and Laura House



*Our Hearts
Are Home*



*"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity."
–Proverbs 17:17*

Although every day is hard for a newly bereaved parent, the holidays can be especially challenging and painful. How can you, as a friend or family member, help your grieving loved one during this Christmas season?

It's the little things.

What may seem like a trivial thing to you, may mean the world to a grieving parent. Here are a few ideas from our own experience and from the experience of other bereaved parents. We hope you'll find something that you can use to help a friend. If you are a grieving parent, perhaps this would be helpful to pass along to the people closest to you, to help them know how they can be a blessing to you.

Mail a Christmas card.

- Choose the card wisely, being sensitive to the situation. Printed messages often seem trivial and the annual family letter you usually include may be hard for them to read. In the card, acknowledge the loss. For example, "I am thinking of and praying for your family during this season. I can't imagine how much you must miss Nathan."
- If you got together with this person during the holidays in the past, perhaps share a special memory about the child who is gone. Those are the greatest gifts to a grieving parent.

While we're on the subject of cards, consider sending one every month, at least for the first year or two. It's astounding how much this small gesture can bless a grieving parent!

Send text messages.

- It's easy to send a short text message multiple times during this season, such as, "I just want you to know that I'm thinking of you today." If you notice something that reminds you of their child, share that memory in your text.



Honor and remember the child.

- Purchase a Christmas poinsettia at your church in memory of the child and let your friend know about it. Give the poinsettia to your friend afterward.
- Did the child have a special interest or participate in a program where you could give a donation? Let your friend know that you honored their child in this way.
- Bake the child's favorite cookies and share them with your local emergency workers in honor of the child.
- Pack an Operation Christmas Child shoebox in memory of the child. Include an item that they would have wanted to include.
- A child's name can be remembered by sponsoring library books, a bench at a local park, or a public space like a section of a local highway, etc.
- Give a monetary gift to a local church or charity in honor of the child.
- Is there an activity that the child loved? Go do it! Take a picture and send a note or text to your friend, letting them know that you did this in memory of the child. Examples might include volunteering at a local shelter, reading a favorite book, visiting a place the child loved, etc.
- Give to a scholarship fund in the child's memory.
- Spend a morning doing acts of kindness around your town in honor of the child.

Anything you do to honor and remember your friend's child will be a blessing to them!



Other Thoughtful Gifts for a Bereaved Parent



Special Ornaments

- What was one of the child's interest? Music? Robotics? Athletics? Purchase a special ornament that reflects that interest and give it to your friend.
- Make an ornament. Do you have a picture of the child who is gone? Perhaps a special memory with your family and the child? Turn that into an ornament. A simple internet search will yield instructions for creating something meaningful.

Personalized Gifts

- Purchase a memory candle with the child's name.
"In Loving Memory of..." Buy extra floating candles to give with the gift.
- Write the child's name in the center of a small plate with permanent markers. Then write all of the words that you would use to describe them around the sides. Bake the plate to set the ink and give it as a gift.
- There are many online sites that offer personalized plaques, windchimes, and other memorial items.



Memory Gifts

- Some parents would say that these are the most special of all — a gift that involves a memory you made with their family or the child.
- Give a photo in a frame of the child with you or your family.
- Make a scrapbook or digital book with pictures of the child doing things with you or your family.
- Download to your computer video clips that you have of the child and send them digitally to your friend. (We'd give bonus points for this one!)
- Give your friend a gift certificate to the child's favorite restaurant or another place they enjoyed.
- Create a journal of memories by asking other friends of the child to email you their stories and thoughts. (More bonus points for this one!)
- Search the internet for "memorial gifts" for more ideas.

Additional Ways to Help During the Holiday Season

- Bake Christmas goodies. You might even ask what the child's favorites were. Your friend may not have the energy to bake, but will appreciate the special effort and enjoy the product of your time.
- Don't be offended if they plan to skip Christmas traditions altogether this year. Some newly bereaved parents find comfort in doing things the way they have always done them, but for many, it's too painful and they may need to change things. Be supportive of the decisions they make, even if it's inconvenient for you.
- Ask if they'd like help decorating the house or for a friend to accompany them shopping. Or ask if they'd like to give you a shopping list, then you do the shopping.
- Invite your friend to Christmas events, but assure them that it's fine if they don't feel like coming. They will still feel loved by your invitation and appreciate that you understand if they don't participate. For grieving parents, an event might sound good in the morning, but by the time the event begins, grief may be overwhelming again. Grief is unpredictable, and they may need to change their mind at the last minute. Don't put any expectations on them, such as having them bring a dish, stay for the entire event, or take part in the games and activities.
- Be a good listener. One of the greatest gifts a friend can give to a grieving parent is the gift of listening. Don't offer advice, just "weep with those who weep."
- Pray for your friend.

For more resources visit our website at OurHeartsAreHome.org



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