



Suggestions for Healthcare Professionals

Most helpful:

- Use the child's name when talking to family.
- Provide a private area or room where the family has access to a telephone while they are waiting.
- Let the family know how sorry you are for their loss. This does not infer culpability.
- Make eye contact with parents. Sit if they are sitting.
- Give family permission to talk and express feelings. You are in a position of authority and the parents will look to you for guidance.
- Be prepared to repeat explanation several times. It is difficult to comprehend and absorb this tragic event.
- Speaking to all family members or friends that are present will help to avoid miscommunication during this time of stress.
- Allow the family as much time as needed to hold, rock and say goodbye to their child. A quiet room, free of resuscitation equipment, with a rocking chair and dimmed lighting is appropriate at this time.
- Mementoes are very important. Taking a photograph, a handprint, a footprint, or a lock of hair will have tremendous meaning for the bereaved families.
- Explain what will happen next. Where will the child's body be taken? When will they be able to see their child again? What about an autopsy? If the mother is breastfeeding at the time of the child's death, she will need information about how to handle this.
- Return all belongings to the family, even if they are soiled or cut. It is the parent's decision on whether or not to dispose of these items.
- Be prepared to answer... "Was my baby/child in pain?" "Did they suffer?" "Were they afraid?"

Least Helpful:

- Do not say, “I know just how you feel.” No one knows *exactly* how another person will experience grief.
- Please do not use words like “Why?” or “How come...?” Parents may interpret the use of these words as judging their parenting skills.
- Do not try and rationalize the death of this child. No matter how hard one tries, there is simply **NO** way to rationalize the death of any child.
- Do not ramble on or use technical terms that the family may not understand. It is important to use the correct words when talking with the family about the child that has died. By using dead, death, or died, there is less of a chance that the information you are giving will be misinterpreted.
- Do not focus solely on the mother. Fathers and siblings also need to be included.
- Do not “Hit and Run” with the sad news. Allow time for questions from the family.

Expect many responses to grief. Grieving parents can exhibit many behaviors ranging from hysterical crying to numb silence. There may also be denial, anger, and guilt.

Do not ever think that the age of the child at the time of death determines the impact of the loss.

Families judge staff by their level of compassion as well as their medical skills.

Do not forget about your own reaction and feelings regarding this death. You may need to debrief after dealing with a newly bereaved family in the acute setting. If you do not take care of yourself, you will not be as effective in helping others. Take time to “refill” your cup.