

# HOW CAN I HELP?

## Honest Insight From a Grieving Mother's Perspective

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"I'm so sorry, what can I do, how can I help". We were blessed with an amazing support system after the loss of our son. The only thing in the world I knew that I wanted was what no one could give me... my son back. Admittedly, I have a difficult time asking anyone for help in good times. In the depths of grief, I was at a complete loss to their well-intentioned efforts.

### My Personal Truths

**Just do it.** Bring the meal, take the other kids, honor their deceased child, send the book, write a sweet note letting them know you are thinking about them... just do it. We have no idea what we need, and we have no idea how to ask for anything.



**Say their name.** I remember in the beginning how awkward it was to see people we knew, especially for the first time. I get that most have no idea what to say. I would cry later that "I just want people to say his name!" Eventually, I got better at initiating that conversation. "I know this is hard, but we love to talk about Hunter, and don't be afraid to say his name or tell us a funny story." So many people would later thank us for that, saying that they just didn't know what they should do or say.

**Don't avoid us.** I also remember feeling like some people would avoid us altogether. It would make me angry...we aren't contagious. Your perfect life bubble could burst tomorrow, whether you acknowledge us or not. That's the fragile nature of life and love.

**You are not immune.** No one on this earth is guaranteed tomorrow, no matter how "perfect" you are. My son wasn't healed from his cancer because we didn't pray enough or live Godly enough. I have heard and read some ridiculous things. Just don't. While not the ultimate miracle we prayed for, we are able to now recognize that we were blessed with mini miracles throughout our experience.

# Additionally....

## Do:

- Reach out. Some very comforting words have come from people I hardly knew, and new friendships have formed.
- Find your own way to express your love. We received some unique expressions of love for our son, and we cherish them all!
- Just Listen. Don't try to fix it, it can't be fixed. We appreciate being heard.
- Acknowledge just how bad it really is. It's terrible, it's unfair, it sucks...agreed!
- Offer to connect them to people going through something similar. I think I will always seek connections with others that have experienced childhood cancer, child loss, or the loss of a young adult.
- Give little and often. A simple "just thinking of you" message means more than you will ever know. You remember and you care.
- Be someone's safe person, anytime about anything. I have had friends say I can call them at any time day or night and curse cancer with them. No holding back and no judgment.
- Think about your words. Everything does not happen for a reason...sometimes bad things happen for no reason at all! They are in a better place...nope, the best place for my son is here with me! Any sentence that starts with "At least..."
- Dark humor...you know your audience and your relationship. It's not for everyone...but my daughter and I are truly rockstars at this one.

## Don't:

- Don't use others' pain for your gossip. I would hope we don't have these types in our life.
- Don't compare losses unless it is a truly fitting comparison. I lost my father four months to the day before I lost my son. Both rocked me to my core in very different ways, but they were also two completely different losses. Losing a human child is also not comparable to losing a beloved pet...promise.
- Don't say anything to diminish it. At least you have three kids or at least you still have a son and a daughter. Please, do tell me which of your three you would sacrifice.
- Don't cross the street to avoid talking to them. Neighbors...I am talking to a few of you. It's not a disease. Our tragedy isn't contagious.
- Don't push your faith on the grieving. We do have deep faith, but some people still seem to think you are lacking something if you are mad at God. It is perfectly normal to be angry with God or ask Why Our Child?
- Don't comment on their appearance or judge reactions. We are in survival mode. We may cry one minute or laugh the next. It's the reality of grief.
- Don't wait to send the message or reach out, it is appreciated more than you will ever realize.

Just Do It. Anything is better than doing or saying nothing at all. Promise!