

5

Thoughtful Ways to Help a Parent Who Has Lost a Child



5 THOUGHTFUL WAYS TO HELP A PARENT WHO HAS LOST A CHILD

Dear friend,

The pain of losing a child is impossible to describe. But you don't need to understand it to help someone survive it.

In fact, you don't even have to be close to the parent who has lost a child to have a meaningful impact on their lives and on their recovery. Some of the children and adults who reached out through letters and texts to let me know they were thinking of me and my family—and were standing by ready to help—did not know me at all.

Receiving words of support from anyone and everyone not only lifted my spirits, but also renewed my faith in humanity.

It takes courage to offer support at a time when you're not sure it's wanted, but I assure you, the potential impact on another parent's life is so worth the risk. One simple action or thoughtful word in your own genuine way can save a parent on their darkest day.

Because circumstances and reactions differ, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to supporting a parent who has lost a child, the best advice I can give is to simply open your heart and try. Slowly. Gently. And with love.

What follows are ways my community helped me when tragedy struck, and how they continue to support me to this day. If you find this information valuable, please share it with others in need.



*From my heart to
yours,*

Nikki

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1. Don't Ask, 'How Are You?'

You will see this tip in every book written about grief and loss, but it's worth repeating.

"How are you?" is one of the most jarring questions you can ask a parent who has lost a child.

Of course, this question is just a habit we've all developed, and most of the time we hardly hear the answer. But my first piece of advice is to stay away from this question altogether—maybe forever.

In her book *Option B*, Sheryl Sandberg recommends asking, "How are you today?" When I told friends that this was a better question to ask, I appreciated their effort to use it. Some even added their own twist, such as "How are you today, my friend?" Others bypassed the question completely and got straight to the point by asking one of my personal favorites, "Is there anything I can do to help you or your family today?"

If your goal is to truly understand how your friend or family member is doing and express support, remember that you will receive an authentic answer when you ask an authentic question.

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2. Continue to Share Memories and Thoughts of The Child Who Passed

I wrote an article on this topic titled "[Some People Know Just What to Say.](#)" It elaborates why it's important to so many parents who have lost children that friends and family continue to share memories of their child. After my loss, I had a very hard time talking to people about the minutiae of their day without them first acknowledging my circumstances and emotional state. In other words, acting "normal" does not make parents who have lost children feel normal; it makes them feel worse. We all handle loss differently, but continuing to remember a child who has left our world too soon is one of the best ways you can honor their life and help his or her parents heal.

3. Remember Holidays and Special Occasions

After losing a child, the holidays are not the same. Annual rituals are often too painful to continue, and the family who has lost a child might quietly suffer while all around them, life continues to be "jolly" for everyone else. It takes a very thoughtful and compassionate person to include those who are suffering in their own annual rituals, and to be open to creating special new memories together.

I am forever grateful for the friends who invited my family over for Thanksgiving the year we lost our son, and every year since. It doesn't matter where they host it; we are always invited. Now, six years later, this holiday no longer makes me anxious. I know we have a place to go if we need it. And our family feels larger and deeply supported because of this generous open invitation.

One last point I'd like to mention: do not withhold an invitation because you assume the family has other plans or will receive better offers from friends who are closer to them. Sometimes after loss, it's easier for parents to be with people they don't know all that well. Every offer will touch the heart of a parent in need, whether it's accepted or not.

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4. And Don't Forget the Ordinary Days

Ordinary days can be just as hard as holidays and birthdays. Small check-ins can go a long way. Maybe it's a morning or late afternoon walk. Maybe it's a dinner invitation. Maybe you just drop off cookies or send a short text letting a grieving parent know you are thinking of them and wanting to support them. Parents who have lost a child often struggle to ask for help because they don't know what they need. The grief is relentless and unpredictable. But whether they recognize it or not, they benefit from your energy and need as much of it as they can get to help ground them back into this physical world.

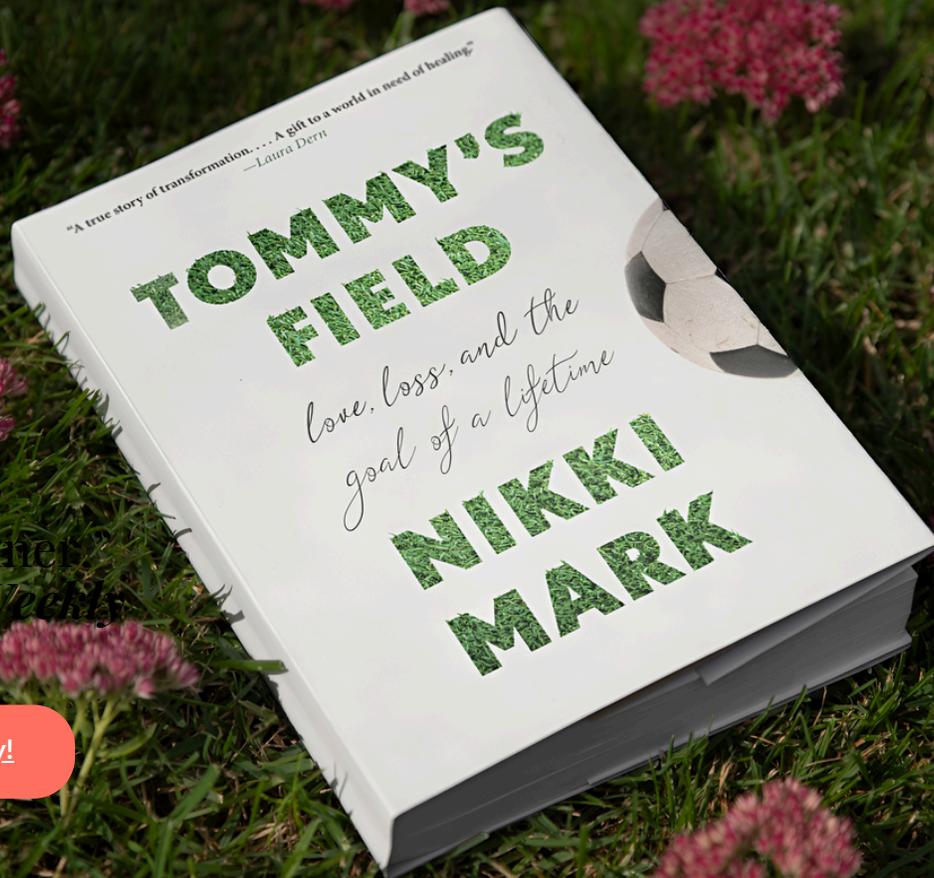
5. Support Their Other Children

Grieving parents not only have to help themselves, they must also find the energy to help any other children they may have. I can't overstate how difficult this is. While my family was fortunate to have a strong community showing up for my younger son on a regular basis, there were a couple of families in particular who opened their doors 24/7 and made a special effort to make him feel like an extended part of their families. When they went on trips or special excursions, they invited my son. When they had family dinners at night, he was always included. Sometimes they arranged sleepovers on school nights, just because.

Children (depending on their age) often benefit from having their own place to process grief, separate and apart from their parents. So, when you help a child in need, you are also helping their entire family.



Sometimes what brings us the most pain can be the very source of our greatest inspiration.



This is a winner
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In 2018, Nikki Mark's twelve-year-old son Tommy went to sleep one night and never woke up. Devastated, Nikki embarked on an unconventional journey to honor Tommy by building his legacy and healing her heart.

From raising over \$1,000,000 to build an athletic field in Tommy's name, to taking on big city politics, to exploring alternative healing modalities from meditation to mushrooms, Nikki now shares her intimate story of navigating grief with love and action – and a little coaching from beyond.



NIKKI MARK formerly developed and led operations for music, hospitality and sports team start-ups. She is the Founder of the [TM23 Foundation](#), which opened the first Tommy's Field in 2021, the second one in 2023—and now has a third field in the planning stages. Her weekly articles, alternative healing toolkit, and free resources can be found at [Nikkimark.com](#). She lives in Los Angeles with her husband, son, and dog Ginger.

