

EQUIPPING

for intergenerational ministry

Helping in times of personal crisis



So what can we do when someone we love has one of those life-changing days?

Too often we call, express our sympathy, and then say, “Please let me know what I can do!” Unfortunately, while the sentiment behind such a statement is good, the reality is that we’ve just added one more thing to the distressed person’s plate. To figure out what to ask someone to do for us when we’re in crisis is nearly impossible, and probably means we won’t ask for anything at all, though our needs may be great.

What to do instead? Anything.

Think about your own life, and put yourself in your friends’ shoes. If you were in their position, what would you need, moment by moment, as you faced that crisis?

Here are a few practical ideas which are pretty general needs for most families.

- Take a meal, but be prepared to be available to stay and talk/listen or not be invited in.
- Make room in your schedule. We are all busy with our to-do lists. However, families in crisis need our availability. Drop your agenda to help them. Be accessible, not overbearing. Listen. Sit. Allow time and space for tears, talking and silence and prayer.
- Serve the family by offering to do daily tasks (folding/ironing washing, mowing lawns etc.) Phrase acts of kindness by saying “We would like to do this for you” (not “can we...” or “how can we help?”) Be specific.

- Provide financial support. Often during times of crisis, work is interrupted, and there may not be sufficient holiday pay. Ordinary bills continue to pile up, there are often extra medical expenses, cars still need fuel and food still needs to be purchased.
- Send a card and continue to send messages of prayer, hope and Bible verses. You may not know what to say, but these words are often received at just the right time. This support through the following months helps the family to know others haven’t forgotten them.
- Help with children. When parents are overwhelmed and minds are spinning, they are also often short-tempered and low on entertaining ideas. Children in the family know something is wrong and they may be stressed too. Having a trusted adult take them out for a couple of hours or for the day is such a welcome thing in most cases, as mum and dad may be feeling guilty about not being much fun in their current situation.

How do we answer those hard questions from children?

Often during times of personal crisis, children ask hard questions. Here are some practical guidelines to help you answer them.

AVOID SIMPLISTIC OR UNREALISTIC ANSWERS

Respond to children’s questions and concerns. Older children may be thinking “Where is God



in all of this?" "How could a loving God let these terrible things happen?" We need to be honest about what has happened. Don't lie or make up a story to protect them, but we don't need to explain things in graphic detail.

Comfort children with assurance of God's loving care for all people. Help them to see God's presence in those who help the people who are going through tragic experiences.

It's easy to say, "Everything is going to be okay", but at the time, it doesn't feel like it. Answers like "God must have needed your mum more than you did" or "God must have needed another angel" are simple answers, but simply not true. Words like this just aren't helpful. If you don't know what to say, simply say you don't know what to say.

EMPATHISE

It's actually okay to come alongside the hurt and say something like, "This is heartbreaking. I'm so very sad too." Validating an emotion is the first step towards dealing with it. Continue to reassure children that they are loved and that you will be there to help and support them.

TALK ABOUT THE HOPE WE HAVE

We have a God who is big and powerful, and while we may not understand what is happening we know that he is writing a bigger story. We need to trust him no matter what happens. God is bigger than our circumstances, and we need to have our roots firmly grounded in him so that when these trials come we are able to withstand them, solid in the knowledge of his love, mercy and grace.

Some more helpful tips for taking care of each other

- Allow time to talk, be angry, cry, laugh and grieve. Try not to bottle up feelings.
- Allow children to share in your distress and encourage them to express their own.
- Allow time to be with people who care about you and also with people who went through what you went through.
- Spend time alone when needed.
- Recognise that everyone expresses things in their own way. Men may find it harder to express emotion and weep. Children may need encouragement and support to express themselves.
- Take time out to sleep, rest, enjoy and do routine things when possible.
- Allow children to return to school & keep up with their activities as soon as they are ready.
- Express your needs clearly and honestly to family and friends.
- Spend time together as a family. This gives us the opportunity to pick up on signals that children are struggling to deal with something.
- Maintain routine as much as possible to help children see that life is secure and predictable.
- Read together some of the Bible messages of comfort in difficult and trying circumstances, e.g. Psalms 23:1-4; Psalm 30:5; Psalm 66:12; John 10:27-28; John 11:25; John 14:27. Talk about what the Bible promises for us in our situation.
- Pray. Prayer is one of the most important things we can do together. We turn our concerns and God's promises into a conversation with God.
- Do something. Children will often feel better when they are given a chance to 'do something'. They may make a drawing, say a prayer or light a candle.
- Watch our children. Difficult situations and crisis are not dealt with in a one-off manner. These concerns will remain in the weeks and months ahead. Kids may revert to 'younger' childhood behaviours if they are anxious or worried about something. They may be quieter than usual or spend more time alone in their bedroom.
- Live one day at a time.



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