

How you can help bereaved siblings

Written by siblings for siblings

We've spoken with some adult siblings whose brother or sister died. We listened as they told us about some of the particularly unique characteristics of this type of loss, along with what does and doesn't help. Here's what they would love you to know.

It has often been said that bereaved adult siblings are the forgotten mourners. People may focus their support on the bereaved parents and on younger children who have lost a sibling, but the grief of those who have lost a brother or sister as an adult can be overlooked.

It is devastating to lose someone who has known you all your life and who was expected to be there throughout your life. Often, adult siblings put their own grief on hold as they feel the responsibility of supporting their parents, especially if they are now an only surviving child. It is so important that they have time for their own grief.

✓ DO

- ✓ **Do** spend time with me.

- ✓ **Do** ask me how I am, not just how my parents are.

- ✓ **Do** continue talking, supporting and helping me after the funeral and beyond. That's when it can get even harder.

- ✓ **Do** ask 'How are you today?' and be ready for an honest answer.

- ✓ **Do** be present – stay around. Don't try to avoid me.

- ✓ **Do** talk about stories of my sibling. Share experiences and memories of them without apologising.

✗ DON'T

- ✗ **Don't** avoid me for fear of saying the wrong thing.

- ✗ **Don't** be afraid of saying the wrong thing – it's better to say something than nothing at all.

- ✗ **Don't** expect me to go through certain 'stages' in my grief. It is not a linear process.

- ✗ **Don't** be offended if I don't share how I am feeling – I may not be ready to talk at that time, in that place.

- ✗ **Don't** push for the facts, if I'm not choosing to share the details with you. Ask about my feelings – they might be more important than the facts to me right now.

✓ DO

- ✓ **Do** be honest – remember my brother or sister as they really were, not as an angel.

- ✓ **Do** keep talking with me about your life.

- ✓ **Do** apologise for your lack of contact (and don't let previous lack of contact stop you getting in touch again).

- ✓ **Do** ask me sincerely how you can help and follow through on it.

- ✓ **Do** bring meals – they are so appreciated! If you can bring them in disposable containers, that would be a great help as I may struggle with basic household admin for a while.

- ✓ **Do** be normal with me.

- ✓ **Do** accept that my life has changed. There is a new normal now.

- ✓ **Do** accept me as I am, with all my thoughts, emotions and needs at this time.

✗ DON'T

- ✗ **Don't** be afraid of being sad, or of me being sad.

- ✗ **Don't** be offended if I say no to meeting up or going out.

- ✗ **Don't** stop suggesting we meet up or go out, even if I've said 'no' the last few times.

- ✗ **Don't** try to find a 'silver lining' and say 'Well, at least...'. Just accept that it's bad.

- ✗ **Don't** assume that your relationship with your siblings is the same as mine.

- ✗ **Don't** make me feel guilty for being happy sometimes.

- ✗ **Don't** rank different griefs/losses as more or less difficult. They are all difficult and all unique.

- ✗ **Don't** apologise for talking about your own difficulties – I'm still interested in you.

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