

# FOR FRIENDS OF THE GRIEVING

*For Friends of the Grieving. How You Can Help - and Hurt.*

Chapter 5 of Candy McVicar's and Dr. Gary Chapman's Book,  
*Holding on to Love After You've Lost a Baby: The 5 Love  
Languages® for Grieving Parents*

When a baby or infant dies, friends and family often are at a loss for how best to help the newly grieving parents in a way that will be most comforting and supportive to them.

So, what is helpful to say and do? How can you avoid saying things that may be perceived as hurtful? Our tools will empower you to navigate the valleys, hills and curves of this grief journey. You can be a blessing to your friend when emotions are raw. You can do this!

The following information is from the book – *Holding on to Love After You've Lost a Baby: The 5 Love Languages® for Grieving Parents*. The Missing GRACE Foundation's founder is the co-author of this book with Dr. Gary Chapman. These pages are written with permission from the publisher, and you may print these pages from "For Friends of the Grieving: How You Can Help - and Hurt" to share with family and friends so they may learn from this and hopefully begin to grieve together with you in ways that help and not hurt.

## Helpful Words

- I don't know what to say, but I'm so sad. We are thinking of you and praying.
- However you need us, we are here for you.
- We love you guys.
- We miss them, too.
- This is not taken lightly; it truly affects us. Please know that we are all deeply saddened by your incredible loss.
- This world won't be the same without them here.
- We all missed out. It's not okay.
- The significance of your baby's life is so profound.
- This is the hardest news for a parent to have to face.
- I don't understand why this has happened, but I do know that this baby's life still has a purpose, and their story will touch many lives.
- I can't fathom how badly you're hurting, but I want to love you through the pain. I hope I can help somehow.
- Can I hug you? Can I hold your hand?
- What's going through your mind? What are you feeling?
- Can I look at your photo album?
- Can I go with you or have permission to go by myself to the grave to take flowers?
- Do you need space, or do you need us to be close right now? If it changes, that's okay too.
- We want to honor their memory. What would be meaningful for us to do?
- We won't ever forget. He will live on in our hearts.
- She is treasured. She is always going to have a special place in our memory.

- I am thankful to know we will see him again in heaven, but right now that's a long way off and I can't stop crying when I think about him.
- You're a good mom and dad. You loved her well and would have done anything for her. We all know that.
- I know wishing doesn't do anything, but I can't help wishing I could hold her again.
- She was so precious. So beautiful.
- He was such a gift.
- I am thankful I got to meet him.
- I am sad I didn't get a chance to spend more time with him.
- Look at that butterfly. It makes me smile and think of her and brings peace to my heart.

## Helpful Actions

- To admit you don't know how it feels.
- To send cards or forms of acknowledgment on anniversaries and/or out of the blue.
- To offer delayed acknowledgment versus none at all.
- To say their baby or child's name and talk about him or her openly and often.
- To give opportunities for parents to talk about their baby and their feelings.
- To leave the door open for the parents to join you for events such as parties and showers but not pressure them when they decline. Support them in their decisions.
- To bring up your own infant/child loss if you have had one, and be open to discuss your pain with transparency.
- To offer and provide ongoing practical help for daily life in the months and years after a loss: bring meals, clean their house, watch their children, give parents a chance to be alone, mow the lawn, shovel snow, run errands, send them for a massage or to get pampered.

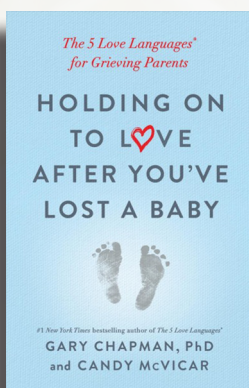
## Hurtful Words

- ***"He/she is in a better place."*** The parents feel their loving home was a very good place to raise their child—and their arms are aching for their baby now.
- ***"It's God's will."*** Many bereaved parents hold the belief it was not God's will to have their baby die, and they feel it's a tragedy that happened in a world where bad things can happen to good people. They believe God did not cause it to happen. To say it is "God's will" can also imply this is God's judgment on the parents.
- ***"God has a plan and it was His perfect plan for this to happen. All things work together for good."*** The parents may or may not believe in God, but saying this will definitely push them away from God. How can it be God's plan to hurt a baby? God is a God of life and not the author of death. He has plans to give a hope and a future. Right now, the situation is not good and it is hard to see that good things could ever come of this tragedy. Let them discover on their own the blessings and gifts that may come over time through their child's story.
- ***"At least you have other children."*** The child they lost still had a special place in their life and is gone now. No other child can replace or fill that void.
- ***"At least it wasn't a real baby."*** This is in reference to an ectopic or molar pregnancy or miscarriage. The baby was very much alive and real. This is insulting to parents.
- ***"At least you weren't that far along."*** The moment they found out they were pregnant with that baby they began to love them, and they wish they had been able to get further along. This statement does not ease the pain.
- ***"At least you didn't get attached."*** Oh, but they were attached.
- ***"If it's not perfect, you don't want it."*** The parents felt their baby was perfect; and no matter what health issue the child had, they wanted him or her in their life.
- ***"It's not meant to be."*** How can that be true? There is no comfort in this platitude.
- ***"Everything happens for a reason."*** Right now, it is hard to make sense of this and find a good reason.

- ***“You can have another one.”*** Maybe they can but maybe not, due to issues you are unaware of or they are unaware of. Anyway, that sounds like a long way off and it doesn’t help now.
- ***“If your baby lived, then maybe they would have been bad or unhealthy, so God took him or her.”*** This statement assumes the worst—about the baby and about God. There is no way to know about a child’s future health. Even if the child were to have challenges, the parents would accept dealing with those over the child’s death.
- ***“What was wrong with it?”*** Do not call the baby an “it.” Reference the baby by their name in your conversations. If no name was given, then say “your baby” or “the baby.”

## Hurtful Actions

- Do not bring up the loss of your pet or someone else’s death as to say it is a similar type of pain or experience.
- Do not ignore what happened by saying nothing at all.
- Do not pretend as though things are normal and just fine when they are not.
- Do not exclude or cut them out of group activities—or out of your life.
- Do not make decisions for them. Empower them with choices. For instance, do not empty out the nursery before they get home from the hospital because you think that will be what’s most helpful for them.
- Do not express an attitude that parents should be over their loss by a set time. Bereaved parents don’t get over their babies. They take steps forward in grief and find ways to carry on the memory of their child. Life after loss often requires finding a new normal. Strangers can become friends and friends can become strangers. The length of the grieving process is different for everyone.



## Suggested Reading

Dr. Gary Chapman and Candy McVicar, *Holding on to Love After You’ve Lost a Baby: The 5 Love Languages® for Grieving Parents* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2020), p. 81 to 86. Find the book online. Scan the QR code below.

ORDER YOUR COPY HERE  
[candymcvcicar.com/purchase](https://candymcvcicar.com/purchase)

