



Sending Condolences

When someone you know dies, you are affected in one way or another. The depth of your relationship with the person who has died or their family or friends affects how you might offer support. By offering condolences, or expressions of comfort and support, you reassure those who are grieving that they are not alone. Your words and gestures can help them through the grieving process.

Many people struggle with knowing 'the right thing to say' when someone close to them dies. Some people worry that their words may not truly express their sentiments or sound insincere. One of the most thoughtful and caring things you can do to support a friend is to be in touch and acknowledge their loss. The way you choose to make contact will vary depending on your relationship. There is no one right or wrong way.

- Sending a card or letter: Traditionally, people have sent a handwritten card or letter to offer condolences. Many individuals still prefer this approach as they see it as more personal.
- Electronic messaging: With the increased use of electronic media, you might find it appropriate to send a text message or email, or to post a message on a Facebook page or an online memorial site affiliated with a funeral home or newspaper. Use what seems to be the best 'fit' for both of you.
- Other ideas: Some people send flowers, fruit, or a gift basket. Delivering home-cooked or commercially prepared meals which can be saved in the freezer is also a thoughtful option. Attach a card or note with cooking or reheating instructions, including whether the item can be frozen. Add a few words to express your care and support. In some circumstances, you might want to make a donation to a charity in the name of the person who has died or to a fund for dependent children.

Regardless of the method of communication or support that you choose, a few lines expressing your sympathy, sadness or concern can be very comforting.

- Use language that your friend or family member would be comfortable with. Some people prefer terms such as 'passing' when referring to someone's death. More and more, however, those who study grief and loss recommend the use of plainer language (e.g. 'death', 'dying') as a clearer way of acknowledging someone's loss.
- Acknowledge the loss of the person and include the person's name. For example, 'I am sorry to hear of the death of your brother, Tom.' Naming the person specifically makes your note more personal and heartfelt.
- Be sincere. Your message does not need to be lengthy to express your feelings of sympathy. Simply write what is in your heart.
- When in doubt, keep it simple.
 - 'I/ we are thinking of you at this difficult time.'
 - 'You are in our thoughts and prayers.' (If you and the recipient are of a religious faith.)
 - 'We will miss your mother dearly.'
 - 'We are saddened to hear of the death (passing) of your mother.'
- Share a special memory of the person who has died and consider including how this memory makes you feel. Writing or reading about your memories reassures loved ones that their

makes you reel. Hearing or reading about your memories reassures loved ones that their family member will not be forgotten. It can help those who are grieving to reflect on their own memories and work through their grief.

- Offer your time or assistance with the many tasks and errands faced by someone who has lost a loved one. Sometimes, those left behind just need someone to talk to about their experiences and feelings. If you are comfortable being available to babysit, go for a walk or provide a shoulder to cry on, offer this in your note. Just be sure you are offering something that you are truly prepared to do.

Things to avoid writing

- Avoid giving advice or saying things such as 'I know how you feel', even if you have experienced the death of a loved one yourself. Every loss is unique and we never truly 'know' how someone else feels. These words are meant to express understanding and bring you closer but can have the opposite effect.
- Avoid using words such as 'you should' or 'you will'. Strong statements that begin with 'you should' or 'you will' may be perceived as unwelcome judgments of their feelings and decisions. Everyone copes differently with death and dying, and the decisions they make are usually what they feel to be best for them. Being supportive of decisions, as long as they are not harmful, is usually the best approach. If you want to engage someone in a conversation about their loss, consider asking open-ended questions that offer an opportunity to share thoughts and stories.
- Avoid talking about yourself. Keep the focus on your friend. If you were also especially close to the person who has died and are overwhelmed with your own grief, providing support can be challenging. You will want to offer condolences, but you cannot expect your friend to comfort you. Seek support for yourself from other friends or support systems.
- Avoid trying to write about the positive aspects of the person's death. Sometimes in trying to make someone feel better, people may say things such as, 'They are in a better place now', or 'At least they are not suffering anymore'. This is seldom helpful and may be perceived as minimizing the loss of the loved one.

When you have forgotten to send your card

Life is so busy that you might not send a card or note as quickly you would have liked. When this happens, you may feel that by sending a card later, you are only stirring things up for the family by bringing up memories of their loved one's death. In reality, when you lose someone through death, they are never really forgotten.

Friends and family may have appeared to have moved forward and be carrying on with their lives, but their loss will be with them always. Even though they may not be talking about it, the memories and grief can continue for a long time. Your thoughts and support will be appreciated at any stage. It is never too late to send a card, letter or message to offer support and condolences to your friend or family member.

For more information about loss and grief, and how you can support others in their grief, visit [MyGrief.ca](https://www.mygrief.ca).

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