Loss of a Child Condolences

When parents have experienced the loss of a child, condolences will mean the world to them. But make sure what you are saying really comes from the heart, and is not an overused cliché or platitude.

What to Say
Finding the right words to express your sadness to the family who has lost their child is not easy. You may be afraid to bring up the child's death for fear of upsetting the parents. However, if you choose your words wisely, you shouldn't have anything to worry about. Just keep it simple and be genuine. Remember, while everyone at one time or another has experienced the loss of a loved one, losing a child is different than losing a parent or grandparent. Try not to compare them. Here are some condolences that can be used when speaking to the child's family or when sending a bereavement card or letter:

- "I'm sorry."
- "What can I do to help?"
- "Tell me about your child."
- "You and (child's name) are in my thoughts and prayers."
- "Do you want to talk about (child's name)?"
- "I will call you." (and really mean it)
- "Take all the time you need."
- "Please be patient with yourself."
- "It's OK to cry."
- "I don't know what to say." (be honest)

What Not to Say
Most people really don't know what to say to a family who has lost a child. It doesn't matter if the child was stillborn, one month old or 30 years old -- he or she was still someone's baby, and should be treated as such. Try to be understanding without saying you understand, because unless you have walked in their shoes, you don't know the grief and loss they are feeling. But if you are still looking for the right words, here are some topics to avoid:

- "It's better now than when (the child) is older."
- "Now you have an angel in Heaven."
- "At least you didn't get too attached to him or her."
- "I understand."
- "I know what you are feeling, because I've lost (fill in the blank)."
- "You're young, you can have more children."
- "Everything happens for a reason."
- "God doesn't give more than you can handle."
- "Are you feeling better yet?"

Nonverbal Loss of a Child Condolences
Condolences don't always have to come through written or spoken words. There are many things loved ones and friends can do to remember the child who has died while still expressing their grief toward the family:

- Listen.
- Have a tree, flowers or bush planted in memory of the child.
- Just give them a hug; no words are needed.
- Don't remove pictures, artwork, etc. from your house for fear it may upset the bereaved parents.
- If the deceased child had siblings, offer to take them out to a movie or to the park. They're grieving too and need attention.
- Place flowers or another memento at the child's grave site, if applicable.
- Make a monetary donation in the child's name to a local charity or hospital.
- Send the parents some flowers or a plant.
- Make a few meals in freezable containers and leave them at their house.
- Hire a housekeeper/gardener to come in and take care of things for awhile.
- Do not remove any of the child's stuff from the parents' house.
- Just hold the parents' hands and allow them to cry or talk about their child.
- If you live out of town, periodically send a postcard to family, just to let them know you are thinking about them.
- Offer to scrapbook items about the child including birth and death certificates, obituary, locks of hair, hand prints and other cherished items.
A Final Thought
Even though the parents may not recognize it immediately, they will be thankful for your words of condolence. Remember to always speak of the child by his or her name because it puts a value on the child's life, no matter how long or short it was. Condolences can also be sent or given on the child's birthday and anniversary of death. The parents will be humbled that someone remembered their child on these dates too. And even if the parents have gone on to have more children, that doesn't mean they don't want to talk about or have forgotten about the child who died.