



## Tips for Friends & Family Post-Crash

*In 2013, Julie Mitchell's 21-year-old son Dylan had recently begun work as an electrical apprentice. He was going to be the fourth generation in his family to join the trade. Dylan had just moved into an apartment in San Francisco. He took the train from his new apartment to the 16th and Mission stop. He then got on his bike, and was riding to a job site nearby when a speeding truck driver struck and killed him.*

*The sudden loss of her first-born son left Julie paralyzed by grief. Julie shared some thoughts with FSS, about what she needed (and didn't need) in those early days.*

### Don't underestimate the importance of your physical presence

Julie says that the best support she found in those early days was “friends who just sat with me when I couldn't do anything else but cry.” Don't underestimate the power of just being there to hold someone's hand and listen. Simply showing up is the most important thing you can do. Facing someone experiencing that level of grief can feel scary, but they will never forget that you showed up for them.

### Help with meals, chores, and errands

After Julie lost Dylan, she found it hard to go out in public. She recommends offering to go to the store or run errands for or with the person you're supporting. “After losing a child you feel so vulnerable and it's so hard to go out in public again,” said Julie. “Everything becomes a monumental task.”

Cooking or housework can also become overwhelming to a person who is consumed with grief. But nourishment, a clean house, and regular routines are grounding. Setting up and managing a [Caring Bridge](#) or [Meal Train](#) website can help include others who want to help – making sure meals meet the family's dietary needs and that they'll be delivered on a schedule they can manage. Even funeral and memorial planning are ways you can gently step in, so that those grieving can focus on honoring their loved one.

### Invite the grieving person to share stories and memories

You may feel awkward talking about the person who was lost – and even uncomfortable saying their name out loud. But this can heighten the feeling that the person is being erased. So say their name out loud, and help to honor their memory by asking the person grieving if they would share stories. Keeping memories alive is a way to show that their loved ones will always be a part of their lives.

### Provide a distraction

If they seem ready, invite them to go for a daily or weekly walk, or join you for something social. For some, distraction may be therapeutic.

### Check in frequently

Let them know you are there if they need you and that you are thinking about them. Do this in a gentle and open way, but don't be demanding. Be okay if there is no response. In fact, tell them they shouldn't worry about responding and you don't expect a response. This isn't a time to take anything personally; it's 100% about the person grieving, and they will be all over the map with their needs and desires.

### What to say – and not to say

Many of us can become stuck when searching for words we think will help.

“Things that don't work are when people say things that they think are going to help you, but they just come out sounding awful,” says Julie. She advises that people not compare their loss to yours. In Julie's case, “there's nothing like losing a child, so unless they've lost a child too, there is no comparison. It's better to say nothing.”

But also know that a simple “I'm so sorry” or “You and (the loved one) are in my thoughts” is always safe. The loss is on the person's mind constantly, so it's not like you're reminding them it happened – instead, you're acknowledging where they're at.

### Here are some resources that Julie and other Families for Safe Streets community members have found useful:

- Harvard Health: [Ways to support someone who is grieving](#)
- [Permission to Mourn](#), by Tom Zuba
- [Grief Prints: A Practical Guide to Supporting a Grieving Person](#), by Radha Stern
- [Walking with Those Who Weep: A Guide to Grief Support](#), by Ron Williams

www.familiesforsafestreets.org/tipsforfriends&family

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*Families for Safe Streets (FSS) confronts the epidemic of traffic violence by advocating for life-saving changes and providing support to those who have been impacted by crashes. Comprised of individuals who have been injured or lost loved ones, FSS was founded in 2014 in New York City and is growing as a national movement with chapters across the country.*