Ten Action Steps

When Grief Comes to Town · Series One · Plain tools for anyone who wants to help

Grief should bring people closer. Fear is what makes them back away.

These ten steps are drawn from the Survivor Network's first series, When Grief Comes to Town. Each step is plain, specific, and something any person — chaplain, officer, neighbor, or friend — can do this week.

01

Say Something. Use Their Name.

"If you have to choose between saying something and saying nothing, say something."

- Say the officer's name out loud — today, not someday.
- Use the name in conversation, not just in ceremony.
- Say: "I've been thinking about [name] a lot lately."
- Ask the family to tell you something about them.
- Do not wait for the right moment. There isn't one.

02

The Funeral Is Not the Finish Line

"The first week is crowded. The third month can be lonely."

- Call at 30 days — a personal call, not a check-box.
- Call again at 90 days, when support often fades.
- Mark the 6-month date on your calendar and act on it.
- Plan something specific for the first-year anniversary.
- Assign one person to hold the calendar and follow through.

03

Do Not Make the Family Ask

""Let me know if you need anything" gives the grieving person another job."

- Name the day, name the task — then ask if it works.
- Bring a specific meal on a specific day.
- Mow the lawn, shovel the walk — without being asked.
- Offer specific rides to specific places.
- Call on a scheduled day at a scheduled time.

04

The Department Grieves Too

"A fallen officer leaves more than an empty chair at home."

- Acknowledge the loss by name at roll call — regularly.
- Check in individually with officers close to the fallen.
- Give officers language: it is not weakness to struggle.
- Make chaplain access easy — no appointment required.
- Watch for officers who go quiet and pull away.

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05

The Children Are Listening

“Children remember who kept showing up.”

- Use the parent’s name naturally — not just in ceremony.
- Remember children’s birthdays and school milestones.
- Ask them to share a memory — don’t assume they won’t.
- Check in at the start of each school year and before holidays.
- Invite older children to department memorial events.

06

Neighbors Have a Job Too

“Care should not be left only to agencies and organizations.”

- Bring food — a specific meal, on a specific day.
- Take on a recurring task: lawn care, mail, trash.
- Send a card on the anniversary — just the name, just the date.
- Show up during the holidays, which are often the hardest stretch.
- Come back. Let the family know you have not forgotten.

07

Use the Calendar

“Grief keeps dates.”

- Write down the death anniversary and act on it every year.
- Record the officer’s birthday and family birthdays.
- Note the children’s key school milestones.
- Plan for Thanksgiving, Christmas, Memorial Day, Police Week.
- Reach out before the hard date arrives — not after.

08

Do Not Turn Grief Into a Speech

“Most grieving people need fewer speeches and more steady people.”

- One short sentence is almost always better than a long one.
- “I’ve been thinking about you.” Then wait.
- “I don’t have anything that fixes this. I’m just here.”
- Avoid explaining the loss, comparing it, or offering reasons.
- Leaving quietly is better than filling every moment with noise.

09

When the Community Does Not Know What To Do

“Most people are not heartless. They are untrained.”

- Say something. Do not wait for the perfect words.
- Use the name. The person who died is still part of the conversation.
- Make specific offers — name the day and the task.
- Come back. Grief does not end in a week.
- Ask the chaplain. They have seen this before.

10

Keep the Circle Strong

“The family should not have to carry the name alone.”

- Assign one person to hold the remembrance calendar.
- Acknowledge the anniversary every year — a call, a card, a presence.
- Include the fallen in department events without the family asking.
- Review the circle every six months: who is still connected?
- Build acknowledgment into culture — ordinary decency, repeated.

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