What To Do When Grief Comes to Town

A plain checklist for neighbors, friends, colleagues, and community members

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

SAY SOMETHING

- Say the officer's name out loud.
- Say something — anything — rather than staying silent.
- Try: "I've been thinking about [name]."
- Don't wait for the perfect words. There aren't any.
- Ask the family to tell you something about them.

MAKE SPECIFIC OFFERS

- Bring a meal on a specific day — don't make them ask.
- Mow the lawn, shovel the walk, or rake leaves.
- Offer a specific ride to a specific place.
- Help with paperwork, benefits calls, or errands.
- Take the children for an afternoon — name the date.
- Come sit quietly — not to talk, just to be present.

SHOW UP AFTER THE FUNERAL

- The first week is crowded. The third month is lonely.
- Call at 30 days — just to check in.
- Call again at 90 days.
- Mark the 6-month and 1-year date on your calendar.
- Do not wait for them to reach out. Reach out first.

USE THE CALENDAR

- Write down the anniversary of the death.
- Write down the officer's birthday.
- Note the children's birthdays.
- Plan something simple for Thanksgiving and Christmas.
- Acknowledge Memorial Day and Police Week.
- Send a card — even just the name and the date.

KEEP SHOWING UP

- One visit is kind. Two visits is care. Keep going.
- Let the family know the name is still remembered.
- Ask how the children are doing — by name.
- Check in at milestones: school events, graduations.
- Ask a neighbor or friend to share the load with you.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- Avoid: "Let me know if you need anything."
- Avoid: explaining the loss or offering reasons.
- Avoid: comparing their grief to someone else's.
- Avoid: disappearing after the ceremony.
- Avoid: making the family manage your feelings.
- When in doubt: say the name, then listen.

"The Survivor Network pulls people towards the objects of God's affection — people who are suffering and grieving." — Chaplain Steve Rekedal