

Checklist for loved ones of the grieving parents immediately following the death of a child:

Written from personal experience by:
Maureen Walgren (mom to Corey, forever 16)

Someone you know just had a child die. It's every parent's worst nightmare and it just happened to your friend or a family in your community. You want to help but have no clue what to do. This family needs your support right now. They are in shock and don't know what to do themselves. They can't remember what they told you 15 minutes ago. They need help functioning. Here is a checklist to use as a starting point in the immediate days/weeks following the death of their child.

- Help them pick a funeral home and make the call. Set up the appointment for mom and dad to meet the funeral home representative. (the coroner will be calling soon and will need to know where to send their beautiful child)
- You'll need a nice photo of the child for the obituary. Help them go through recent photos.
- Start a donation account through Go fund me or You Caring to raise money for the funeral. Funeral expenses are around \$20K!
- By now someone should have contacted the church (assuming there's a church). Sometimes a reception can be held at the church immediately following the funeral for the general crowd. You may want to plan to have immediate family and very close friends at a restaurant or country club later. Have someone organize/get pricing for the restaurant dinner and book a place. Someone else can plan the menu, etc. The parents can't make these petty decisions right now. Hopefully the fundraising page will raise enough to cover the costs.
- If family will be coming from out of town, call around to area hotels and get pricing, reserve a block of rooms. Leave the name and number of the hotel on a pad of paper on the kitchen counter to give to out of town family when they call.
- Buy some soft black slippers for mom to wear at the wake (it's a lot of standing)
- Ask mom what her size is and favorite stores to shop at and go buy her 3 outfits to choose from. Return what she doesn't wear.
- Have a girlfriend go with her to pick out the flowers for the services.
- Check life insurance to see if they have a clause for their kids on the adult plan.
- Someone take the other children shopping for funeral clothes or pick out/iron clothes they already have.
- Get the husband's suit and shirt dry cleaned if needed. Buy a new tie if needed.

- Check with parents if they want this but it helped us a lot: Call the mom and dad's doctor's office and leave a message for the nurse that this tragedy has occurred and mom and dad are requesting anti anxiety meds to be called into the local pharmacy. Tell them a follow up appointment can be scheduled in a couple of months but something is needed immediately. If they've seen their doctor recently this shouldn't be a problem. It can help with sleep and panic attacks especially the first couple of weeks.
- Run the vacuum (there is a lot of foot traffic in and out). Don't ask where is the vacuum? Just go find it.
- Take out the trash.
- Keep the kitchen clean.
- Keep a grocery list of "out of" things and the next person who asks what they can do gets the grocery list.
- Keep a pot of coffee going with disposable cups for all the people coming and going.
- Get a stack of paper plates/napkins/utensils and keep it on the counter.
- Start a meal train through one of those online meal train sites (not every night or it's too much food)
- Put two coolers (one for hot, one for cold) outside the front door and leave instructions on your meal train site to leave the food in the coolers and to please deliver by 5pm (etc).
- Clean out the freezer to make room for extra food that can be frozen.
- Check the fridge every couple of days for the first few weeks to clear out nasty leftovers.
- Assign someone to make the poster boards with pictures for the wake (we had categories: family vacations, friends, dad's side of the family, mom's side of the family, the growing up years). Someone needs to go buy the poster boards and photo tape. Funeral homes have easels.
- Walk around the house and collect the pictures they have in frames of their family/child. These can be displayed at the wake.
- Assign someone to sit at the computer and go through all the files of digital photos and put them in a dropbox so that you can send them to Walmart or Walgreens to be printed for the poster boards.
- Put all these digital photos on a thumbdrive and the funeral home will play the slideshow at the wake.
- Assign someone to make the "program" for the church after they've picked out all the songs and readings. (some churches do this for you) Find a printer than can make lots of copies.
- They will need someone to do the readings. (usually a cousin or close friend)
- A close friend or family member should be working on a eulogy.
- Assign someone to order sandwich trays or snacks to have in the private family room for the family to eat during the wake.
- Assign someone to be in charge of the siblings at the wake (Take them home when needed, make sure they eat, etc).

- If you're his/her best friend or closest sibling, come up with a code word that if she says it to you then you know it means "get me the heck out of here now or I will stop breathing". (my code word was "chicken soup")
- Make sure there is a sign in book at the services and that people are actually signing it. They will not remember who was there and it's nice to go back in a few months and read through the names.
- Put a basket at the house for cards that mom and dad can just keep all the cards in one place. They won't remember reading the cards but it's nice to go back weeks or months later and re-read all the cards.
- If you notice something needs to be tidied up at the house, tidy it! Straighten shoes in the entryway, clean a toilet, buy Kleenex and have extra boxes around the house. Re-stock the toilet paper.
- Have water bottles at the ready. (Lots of people coming and going.)
- Don't ask "what can we do", just do it. Mom and dad can't think for themselves right now. They can't even remember if they asked you for something. Just make sure things get done that need to be done.
- Don't try to "fix" them or "cheer" them up. They don't want that right now. There's nothing to say, just be there for them. Don't be offended when they snap at you or can't answer your questions.
- Buy mom and dad's favorite alcohol or beverage and stock it.
- They probably won't want to eat, just heat up the food and put it in front of them. Gently tell them to take a bite.
- Make a couple of days lunches for their other children when they go back to school.
- Coordinate getting their other kids to/from their activities. After the funeral/services, sit with mom to get the kids schedules so that you can put together a schedule/carpool for the first few weeks.
- Sitting around with nothing to do? Strip a bed and wash the sheets.
- Have their child's friends over to tell stories with the siblings in the room listening. The siblings want to hear funny stories about their brother/sister.
- Have a family member help them organize bills and pay the bills that are essential right now.
- Take the dog for a walk. Feed the dog.
- Offer to drive the parents where they need to go in the first few days, they probably shouldn't be driving themselves right now.
- Assign mom and dad a "person" who is in charge of their needs at the wake. (change out mom's dress shoes for the comfy slippers after an hour, have a basket with hard candies, Chapstick, water, tell mom and dad it's time for a break occasionally, hold up the line until they get back, walk the line and tell people mom and dad want to hear stories about their child)
- Send a card. A day, a week, a month, a year later. Send a card. The old fashioned kind with an envelope and a stamp. Tell them a favorite story about their child in that card.
- Don't tell them you understand what they're going through because your 95 year old grandmother died and you were close with her.

- Don't tell them "it's God's plan" or "everything happens for a reason" or "it will get better with time". That doesn't help at this moment. There's nothing to say. Just be there. Listen to them. Just listen.
- Don't tell them a story about "so and so's" kid who died of the same thing. They don't care right now. Just be there.
- If you're a family member or close friend don't "stay away" to give them space, stop by and see what you can do. Sometimes just sitting there is enough. An empty house is scary the first week or two for these bereaved parents.
- Weeks later or months later, invite mom or dad for coffee or a walk. When they say no, ask again a week or two later. When they say no, ask again. Eventually they will say yes.
- Months later if they're having a hard time (which they will), stop by with dinner or put a potted plant on their front door step, plant some flowers, pick the weeds.
- If you're not already Facebook friends, don't send them a friend request the week their child dies, it feels intrusive. If you want to reach out, mail a card, send an email, send a message but don't send a 'friend request'.
- Put this list on the kitchen counter by the command center and allow people to check things off as they get done.