HELPING A BEREAVED PARENT

Approach the bereaved parent rather than waiting for them to come to you.

Say their babies' names and include them in conversation.

Make eye contact. Gently touch them or offer a hug if it seems appropriate.

Don't make comparisons with your own experiences of bereavement.

Just listen to them and allow them to cry. This is their time to talk and yours to listen...

...but also let them be silent. They don't always need to talk.

If you ask them how they are, make sure you have the time to listen to their answer - it's important they don't feel rushed or get the impression that you would rather be elsewhere.

Invite them out for a coffee, but understand if they feel they can't be around lots of other people yet.

Suggest going for a walk with them, as conversation is easier when you walk together.

Understand that their appearance of doing well may be deceptive.

Arrange a specific date to meet up, rather than vague comments that 'we should get together'.

TAMBA, Twins and Multiple Births Association, Manor House, Church Hill, Aldershot, Hants, GU12 4JU.

Twinline - freephone helpline: 0800 138 0509 (10am-1pm and 7pm-10pm seven days a week).

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Think about what you say - “At least you’ve got another one”, “Try to think positively” or “They’ve gone to a better place” are not helpful comments to somebody who has just lost their babies.

Don’t forget the father. Tell him too you are sorry and don’t tell him to “stay strong”.

Offer practical help. Take the other children to the park or look after them for a while. Make a cup of tea, wash up, or bring food round. But also be aware they may want different things.

It is never too late to say something - even several years later. You can always ask how they are and apologise for not being there at the time.

Don’t rush their grief - it can take years to accept the loss of a child.

Don’t assume that they can have more children. It may not be possible.

Remember that it is going to take a long time for them to accept what has happened. They may well not go back to being that same person that they once were. Many people say that it is a new kind of normal.

Adapted from: Hurcombe (2004) and the Multiple Births: Bereavement Support website (Canada) with the input of parents from Tamba’s online Bereavement Support Group (2017).

This fact sheet is an extract from our updated 2017 Tamba Bereavement Support Group Booklet. If you would like to see the whole booklet you can download it here: www.tamba.org.uk/bereavement or you can email support-team@tamba.org.uk

Tamba’s Bereavement Support Group (BSG) was established in 1982 in response to requests from parents who had lost a twin. All BSG befrienders are volunteers who have suffered a loss from a multiple birth either during pregnancy, at birth or at any stage after birth.

None of the befrienders are ‘professionals’. They offer a befriending NOT a counselling service. Contact with another parent who has gone through a similar experience can be a source of great help in learning to live with the loss. This peer support can help in overcoming the enormous sense of isolation parents can feel. Tamba have an on-line facility to provide virtual peer to peer support. Details of this caring supportive community can be found by contacting support-team@tamba.org.uk