



MEMORIAL MERITS

Sanctuary, not sales floor.

FREE PRINTABLE GUIDE FROM MEMORIAL MERITS

# What to Say When Someone Dies

## Sympathy Card Messages and Ways to Help

What to say to someone who lost a loved one, what to write in a sympathy card, practical ways to help in the first weeks and months, and what to send.

By Gabriel Killian, Founder of Memorial Merits

Edition 1.0, October 2026

Free to print, share, and republish. See the last page.

### Writing a sympathy card today

Turn to page 4. It has a three-line formula and examples for a friend, a coworker, a neighbor and family.

# How to Use This Guide

This guide is for the friend, relative or coworker of someone who is grieving. Each page answers one question.

| Page | What it covers                                              |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3    | What to say when someone dies, and what not to say          |
| 4    | What to write in a sympathy card                            |
| 5    | How to help someone who is grieving                         |
| 6    | What to send, and when                                      |
| 7    | When someone loses a pet                                    |
| 8    | People to check on                                          |
| 9    | Services for sending flowers, food and gifts, with QR codes |
| 10   | Free Memorial Merits tools and pages                        |

## Sharing this guide

Anyone may print, copy, share or republish this guide for free, including on a business website or as a free download. Keep every link and QR code unchanged. The details are in the box on the last page.

# What to Say When Someone Dies

Short and honest is better than polished. Use the person's name. Then listen.

## What to Say to Someone Who Lost a Loved One

- "I am so sorry about [name]."
- "I don't know what to say. I'm here."
- "[Name] was always kind to me. I will miss them."
- "Would you tell me about them?"
- "I'm dropping off dinner Thursday. Is 6 o'clock all right?"
- "I was thinking about you today."

## What Not to Say

| Instead of                          | Try                                                        |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| "I know how you feel."              | "I can't imagine how hard this is."                        |
| "Everything happens for a reason."  | "This is so unfair. I'm sorry."                            |
| "At least they lived a long life."  | "I'm glad I knew them."                                    |
| "Let me know if you need anything." | Offer one task on one day: "Can I mow your lawn Saturday?" |
| "You need to stay strong."          | "You don't have to be okay right now."                     |

## Weeks and months later

- Keep saying the person's name. It tells the family the person is remembered.
- Mark the date of the death, their birthday and the first holidays on your calendar, and send a text that day.
- Ask how they are sleeping and eating. If grief is still severe after many months, point them to grief support.

# What to Write in a Sympathy Card

Three short lines are enough:

- 1 Say you are sorry, using the person's name.
- 2 Share one memory or one thing you admired about them.
- 3 Offer one specific kind of help, or say you will check in.

## Sympathy card messages by relationship

| For                              | Example message                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A close friend                   | I am so sorry about your mom. I will never forget her laughing at our Sunday dinners. I'm bringing groceries Saturday morning. |
| A coworker                       | I was sorry to hear about your father. Please take the time you need. I'm covering the Tuesday calls until you are back.       |
| A neighbor                       | We are so sorry about Frank. He waved to our kids every morning. We'll take care of your trash cans for the next few weeks.    |
| A family member                  | I miss Grandpa already. His stories about the farm are some of my favorite memories. I'll call you Sunday.                     |
| Someone whose spouse passed away | I am so sorry about Linda. The two of you were a team. I'd like to bring dinner Wednesday, if that works.                      |
| Someone whose child passed away  | I am so sorry about Jacob. I'm thinking of you and your family, and I'll keep saying his name.                                 |
| Someone whose pet passed away    | I'm so sorry about Max. He was part of the family. I know how much you loved him.                                              |

## Ways to sign the card

With love, With sympathy, Thinking of you, Always here for you,

## Draft your card

---

---

---

---

---

# How to Help Someone Who Is Grieving

Pick a task, name a day, and do it. Check off what you have done.

| Done                     | Task                                                                                    | Day |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Bring a meal, or set up a meal sign-up so friends do not all bring food the same night. |     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Pick up groceries or prescriptions.                                                     |     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Drive children to school or activities.                                                 |     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Mow the lawn, walk the dog or take out the trash.                                       |     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Sit with them at the service.                                                           |     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Help address thank-you notes.                                                           |     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Help sort mail and paperwork, if they ask.                                              |     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Return dishes and containers from the meals people brought.                             |     |

## Calendar for the first year

| When                  | What to do                                                  |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>First week</b>     | Bring food, run errands, attend the service.                |
| <b>Weeks 2 to 4</b>   | Visit or call once a week.                                  |
| <b>Months 2 and 3</b> | Invite them out for coffee or a walk. Keep the plan simple. |
| <b>Six months</b>     | Send a card or text. Say the person's name.                 |
| <b>First holidays</b> | Invite them to join you, and accept a no.                   |
| <b>One year</b>       | Mark the date. Call, visit or send a note.                  |

More ways to help: [how to help a grieving friend](#).

## What to Send When Someone Dies

| What to send                            | When                                              | What to know                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Flowers for the service</b>          | Arrive by the day before the service              | Send to the funeral home. Check the obituary first; some families ask for donations instead. |
| <b>Flowers or a plant to the home</b>   | The week after the service                        | A plant lasts longer than cut flowers.                                                       |
| <b>Food</b>                             | First two weeks                                   | Use dishes that do not need to be returned.                                                  |
| <b>Wine or drinks for the gathering</b> | Before the gathering                              | Ask the family first.                                                                        |
| <b>A donation in the person's name</b>  | Any time                                          | Use the charity named in the obituary.                                                       |
| <b>Help with funeral costs</b>          | Before the service                                | Give through the family's fundraiser page if they have one.                                  |
| <b>A custom memorial song</b>           | Any time, often for the service or an anniversary | A song written about the person, as a gift for the family.                                   |
| <b>A card</b>                           | Now, and again at one month and one year          | See page 4.                                                                                  |

Flowers, wine and gifts compared: [sympathy flowers and gifts](#). Services are on page 9.

### On the card with flowers

Write your full name and how you knew the person, for example: "From Maria Lopez, Frank's coworker at the plant."  
The family often reads these cards later and may not know every name.

# When Someone Loses a Pet

Grief for a pet is real grief. Use the pet's name, just as you would for a person.

## What to say

- “I’m so sorry about [pet’s name]. They were lucky to have you.”
- “I’ll miss [pet’s name] greeting me at the door.”
- “Would you like to share some photos? I’d love to see them.”

## Pet Loss Gifts

| Gift                            | What to know                                              |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| A pet urn                       | Choose one with space for the pet's name (page 9).        |
| A framed photo                  | Ask a friend or family member for a favorite photo first. |
| A custom pet song               | A song written about the pet (page 9).                    |
| A donation to an animal shelter | Give in the pet's name and tell the owner.                |
| A handwritten card              | Name the pet and share one memory.                        |

More pet loss gift ideas: [what to give someone who lost a pet](#).

# People to Check On

Write down the people you want to support and the dates that matter to them.

| Name | Who they lost and when | Dates to remember | Last check-in |
|------|------------------------|-------------------|---------------|
|      |                        |                   |               |
|      |                        |                   |               |
|      |                        |                   |               |
|      |                        |                   |               |
|      |                        |                   |               |
|      |                        |                   |               |
|      |                        |                   |               |
|      |                        |                   |               |
|      |                        |                   |               |
|      |                        |                   |               |

## Notes

## Services for Families

Memorial Merits has reviewed each service below. Scan a QR code with your phone camera, or type the web address under it.

### Teleflora



Funeral and sympathy flowers delivered to the funeral home or the family's home.  
<https://memorialmerits.com/funeralflowers>

### Flowers Fast



Same-day sympathy flower delivery.  
<https://memorialmerits.com/flowersfast>

### WineExpress



Wine delivered for the gathering after the service.  
<https://memorialmerits.com/wineexpress>

### One Special Song



A custom song written about the person, as a gift for the family. Pet songs too. Code **memorial10** takes 10 percent off.  
<https://memorialmerits.com/memorialsong>

### Ever Loved



Free fundraiser page where friends can give toward funeral costs.  
<https://memorialmerits.com/fundraising>

### Pulvis Pet Urns



Handmade urns for dogs, cats and other pets. Use code **MemorialMerits** at checkout.  
<https://memorialmerits.com/peturns>

### Tender Rest



Pet urns you can customize with a name and photo.  
<https://memorialmerits.com/tenderresturns>

## Disclosure

Memorial Merits may earn a commission when you use the links and QR codes in this section, at no extra cost to you. Codes and offers were checked in October 2026 and can change.

# Free Memorial Merits Tools and Pages

Each page below is free to use. Scan a code, or type the web address.

## Grieving Resources



Every grief and memorial guide on Memorial Merits.  
<https://memorialmerits.com/grieving-resources/>

## How to Help a Grieving Friend



What to say, what to do and what to avoid.  
<https://memorialmerits.com/supporting-someone-grieving-how-to-help-friend/>

## Sympathy Flowers and Gifts



Flowers, wine and gifts for the family, compared.  
<https://memorialmerits.com/funeral-flowers-memorial-wines-sympathy-gifts-same-day-delivery/>

## Memorial Merits Start Page



Choose your situation and find the right page.  
<https://memorialmerits.com/start/>

## More free printable downloads

A supporting someone grieving checklist, a pet loss gift guide and more:

<https://memorialmerits.com/free-grief-support-downloads-guides-trackers-resources/>. Main site:  
<https://memorialmerits.com/>.

## About Memorial Merits

Memorial Merits is a free planning platform for families before, during and after a death. It was founded by Gabriel Killian. Prices, codes and benefit amounts in this guide were checked in October 2026; confirm them with each provider before you pay.

## Republish This Guide

Funeral homes, hospices, places of worship, employers, websites and other businesses may republish, copy, print and share this guide for free. You can post it on your website, hand it to clients, or offer it as a free download or lead magnet.

**The one condition:** keep every link and QR code in this guide unchanged.

To add your business name or logo, or to add your own links, send a request at <https://memorialmerits.com/partner/>.