

## **How to write a note to a grieving friend.**

**Dr. Jon Swanson**

It's often helpful to send a friend or acquaintance a card to recognize their grief. You can buy an expensive sympathy card, but sometimes you can send a simple note acknowledging that you know of their loss.

You don't have to fill the whole space, just like you wouldn't fill the room with noise. This is not the time for an essay. Simple words and white space are often exactly right.

### **Here are some suggestions if you choose that route:**

- Put the date in the upper left corner
- Start the card with their name – “Jim”
- Acknowledge the loss: “I’m sorry to hear about your mom.”
- Acknowledge the meaning: “I know how much she meant to you.”
- Identify your action: “I will keep asking God to make you aware of His peace and presence.”
- Sign it with your name – “Jon”

### **If appropriate, you can add these things:**

- Acknowledge how much the person valued them: “She always told me you were so helpful to her.”
- Identify shared experience: “I remember the time the three of us spent together.”
- If appropriate, you can say that you are giving a memorial gift, or that you will be over to shovel at the first snowfall, or that you will have a bag of groceries on the front step.
- Don't insert your loss in a comparative way. “I remember when my mom died,” unless it is to say, “I remember when my mom died, you and your mom were so helpful. You taught me well. I will be helping you, too.”

### **Here are some samples:**

If I were there, I'd give you a hug and then sit and listen quietly. As you read this, imagine that's what I'm doing.

I'll see you soon.

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I know how much your mom cared about animals. I'm giving a gift to the animal shelter she loved in her memory. And because you don't need more things to do, you're welcome.

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I'm not going to ask how you are doing or suggest how tragic this is or offer suggestions for what this means.

I'm just letting you know I know this is hard.

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I know that you are looking for answers right now. I know that people are offering answers, suggesting how you should feel, how you should handle all this.

I wanted to let you know that I'm not going to do that. I'm not sure that there are helpful answers right now.

But I'm here, even in the uncertainty.

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I never knew your dad. But I know how much you respected him.

I do know you. I know how you are living your life, how you are living out his values and your own. And I'm pretty sure that your dad would be proud of you.

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Ah friend. This is hard. I know that the relationship was challenging for you. And in all the people saying all the things about how sad they are, and how sorry they are, I wanted to let you know that I know more of the story. And I'm cheering for you in this difficult time.

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Dear friend.

I know that words don't fix things. I also know that words let people know that we care when we aren't in the same room.

I care. I'll come when I can.

Peace.

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Dr. Jon Swanson is a writer, hospital chaplain, researcher, and teacher who helps people find sense at urgent and important times. His book, [\*"This is Hard": What I Say When Loved Ones Die\*](#), is available on Amazon. This post and other research on being helpful in loss is available at [thisishard.substack.com](http://thisishard.substack.com).

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