



We are all devastated and profoundly pained by the loss of Elan Ganeles z'l. We are also all desperate to comfort his special family during this time of extraordinary loss and pain. Sensitivity and thoughtfulness are critical.

Please consider these suggestions:

- **Show Up:** Each person that makes an effort to come to the Shiva home, whether from near or far, close friends or casual acquaintances, provides comfort, love and connection. While we cannot remove or diminish the pain of this unimaginable loss, we can make it just a tiny bit lighter by carrying it together with them, being *nosei b'ol im chaveiro*.
- **Don't Overstay:** Shiva is a comforting time but also an extremely exhausting one. Many people love and want to comfort the Ganeles family. Please be mindful to spend an appropriate amount of time but not to overstay in a way that makes it difficult for others to have time to be menachem. Please respect the shiva hours, no matter how close you may be with the family.
- **Silence is Not Awkward:** It is incredibly difficult to know what to say in circumstances where there is an inexplicable loss. Don't feel obligated to speak or to find the perfect thing to say. Your mere presence at the shiva and the effort you put into being there offers more nechama than any words could communicate.
- **Refrain from Using Platitudes:** In the absence of clear, helpful things to say, it is often tempting to share a platitude such as, "Hashem has reasons even though it's hard to see them," "God only gives challenges to people who can handle them," "Time will heal," "He is in a better place," and many others. While those who say such things may have the best intentions, these statements can be hurtful and harmful, the opposite impact of what we are all trying to achieve.
- **Avoid Intrusive Questions or Personal Experiences:** There is never a time, including and especially during shiva, that it is appropriate to ask intrusive questions. Allow the mourners to direct the conversation and express what they are comfortable sharing and focusing on.
- **Share Stories:** Share personal interactions, stories and memories of the deceased with the family; they are often the greatest source of comfort.
- **Coordinated Help:** The number of people who want to provide meals and other forms of help is incredible and so generous. Rather than simply dropping off food or gifts, please coordinate through the Synagogue or community.



- **Comfort In, Dump Out:** the loss is unbearably painful for so many, a death can raise deep theological questions and evoke a wave of pain and emotion in us. It is critical to be mindful of directing our pain and questions not in, towards the family and their closest circle, but out towards others who can comfort us. When needed, make use of professionals that are available to the community for support and comfort, collectively and individually.

At moments of crisis, family, friends and community often rise to the occasion. It is critical to remember the positive and helpful role that we can and must play when the acute phase passes. Shiva and shloshim may conclude but the pain of the family lasts well beyond the technical period of mourning.

Please make the effort when visiting a Shiva, to find the balance between treating the family normally, sensitively, and giving them space with remembering their pain and being a comforting presence in their lives. It is advised that we neither ignore, nor show excessive pity. We shouldn't avoid nor smother. Don't express greater grief or agony than the grieving family. Don't share how difficult this loss has been for you, how much pain you have been in or how many tears you have shed. After Shiva, welcome them back, express how much they were missed, and reflect back the mood they are showing.

May the Ganeles family and all those who are grieving find strength and comfort and may we share in happy occasions together.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Tuvia Brander

*I am truly indebted to Rabbi Efreim Goldberg of the Boca Raton Synagogue for drafting much of this guidance.