



THE SAMCHAINU SUPPORT GUIDE

# THERE FOR HER

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*Supporting Your Relative or Friend  
After the Loss of Her Husband*

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Free download of the video “There for Her: Secrets to Supporting Your Widowed Relative or Friend”

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*DISCLAIMER: The content of this guide is based on years of experience and the feedback of our Samchainu women. Understandably, people's reactions will vary. Use discretion in your specific situation. When in doubt, ask. We are here to help.*

# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

We are sorry you're here. You are reading this Guide because someone you know and care about has been widowed. She is in pain and hurting. You may be, too. You may have lost a brother-in-law, neighbor, or valued community member. Putting aside your own feelings, you want to be there for the one now living at the very center of the loss- the woman who shared her life, home, family, and dreams with the niftar. His wife.

The loss of a husband is one of such profound pain and loneliness that the Torah, in describing the utter despair of a desolate Yerushalayim compares the city to an **גַּבְלֵי יְרוּשָׁלַיִם** - a widow.

She may have a houseful of young children that she now must raise on her own. She may not have children, or her children may have grown, and she remains alone in a quiet, empty house.

You want to be there for her. You want to say the right words. You want to do the right things. You want to put a balm on her aching soul and a salve on her broken heart.

But along with the desire to help, comes fear. Fear of making it worse. Fear of saying and doing the wrong things, of hurting instead of helping. You may worry about how to relate to her now that she has undergone such a catastrophic loss and her life has changed so drastically.

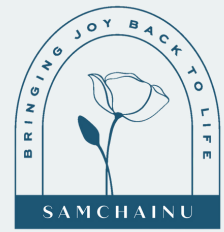
You have so many questions about what your role should be, how you can support her, what you can offer to ease her burden.

You are in the right place.

The Samchainu Support Guide was created in response to people like you- good, caring people who want to help their relative, friend, or neighbor who has been widowed, but aren't sure exactly how. In these pages, we offer you guidance and direction, culled directly from our own experiences as well as the experiences of hundreds of widowed women of all ages and stages.

No two losses are the same, and no two people grieve and heal in the same way. What works for one may not work for another. Think about the unique personality and needs of the woman you want to be there for, and then use the suggestions contained in these pages as a springboard. What is true for all women who have lost their husband is that a supportive community of relatives and friends can make all the difference.

So thank you for caring. She is lucky to have you.



Founded in 2007 by two young widows, Samchainu is an organization dedicated to supporting women who have been widowed and bringing joy back to their lives. Samchainu offers a full array of programs and services designed to help widows rebuild their lives and their families.

Learn more at [samchainu.org](http://samchainu.org)

## EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

# 30 WAYS BE THERE FOR HER



“After six years, I still get chizuk when people tell me how my husband impacted them, and how he is missed.”

“One brother and sister-in-law are always there for us with Shabbos invitations, phone calls all the time, frequent gifts... They are a strong anchor in our life.”

“In the first year I had certain friends that came to my house every evening. It was almost like they planned that one person was always here.”



- 1 Call to say “hi” and check up on her, especially during lonely times.
- 2 Send a card or call her to acknowledge the Yartzeit.
- 3 Take her out for coffee, lunch or dinner.
- 4 Offer to pick her up and go together to social events.
- 5 Visit on long Friday nights.
- 6 Call or text to acknowledge when a grandchild is named after her husband.
- 7 Call her late at night to check in when she returns home alone from making her son’s Bar Mitzvah or marrying off a child.
- 8 If her husband davened in your shul, continue to include her in shul events . Offer to pick her up to go together to a Kiddush, etc.
- 9 Especially in the beginning, it may be hard for her to be alone in the evenings. Ask if she would like company and go visit.
- 10 Drop off something special for Shabbos. Some ideas she may appreciate include flowers, candies, a kugel, a magazine or book.
- 11 Respect her desire to remarry if she chooses. Accept if she is not ready or chooses not to.
- 12 If she would appreciate it, share memories or stories of her husband.
- 13 Express your admiration for her efforts.
- 14 Stay in touch. Don’t let your discomfort get in the way of your relationship.

- 15 Be extra sensitive to her and her children.
- 16 Call and say, "I'm thinking of you. How are you and your family?" Even years later.
- 17 Drop off a muffin, a salad, anything, just because.
- 18 Let her know something you have done in her husband's memory.
- 19 Call just to chat. Share your life with her. Maintain the relationship you had with her before the loss.
- 20 Listen to her vent without trying to make it better or putting a positive spin on her situation.
- 21 If she enjoys learning, offer to learn together in-person or over the phone.
- 22 Include her in your simchos, even if your primary connection to her was through her husband.
- 23 If you are close, visit with your family on Shabbos afternoon.
- 24 Continue to call and leave messages, even if she doesn't answer and doesn't respond.
- 25 Send a gift with a warm note before Yom Tov or for her birthday.
- 26 Listen and validate without giving advice, unless advice has been asked.
- 27 Listen to her even when she shares things that are painful to hear.
- 28 Allow her to talk about her husband.
- 29 Predict difficult days (anniversaries, simchos made alone, Erev Yom Tov) and call or text to let her know you're thinking of her.
- 30 Encourage her to do the things that make her happy.

## EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

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“A good friend sent me a ‘Good Morning’ text every day for the first few years. Depending on the response she got, she knew to be here for me if I was down.”

“They called and left messages even if I didn't pick up. They dragged me out of the house on short walks. They visited so I shouldn't be alone even if I wanted to be. They brought me food since I had no interest in cooking or eating. They sat with me quietly when there was nothing to say.”

“

## PRACTICAL SUPPORT

# 30 WAYS HELP FILL THE GAPS

“I do all the jobs of two people now. I went back to work, take care of the finances, take out the garbage. Any task that you can commit to, please take off my shoulders.”

“Carpools, carpools, carpools. It is so hard to NEVER be able to delegate. Even when I’m sick.”

“At first people baked challah for me, brought me dips, and to this day (eight years in), my neighbor is still making kugel for me each week.”

- 1 Help her navigate the process of dealing with life insurance, social security, or open medical bills.
- 2 Arrange week night suppers or Shabbos meals for her family after shivah is over, for as long as she needs.
- 3 Ask if you can get her anything from the grocery.
- 4 If appropriate, offer to come make havdalah in her home weekly.
- 5 Act as her liaison in dealing with the school administration.
- 6 Help her get in touch with a Rav who can be available to answer her shailos.
- 7 Invite her for Shabbos and Yom Tov meals. Invite for a specific meal or ask her which seudah would work for her instead of issuing open-ended invitations such as, “You’re always invited.” or “Let us know when we can have you.” Invite her early in the week. Be sensitive as to who else you invite when she is coming.
- 8 If she turns down your invitation, invite another time.
- 9 Help her obtain access to qualified attorneys, accountants and other professionals as needed.
- 10 Help her financially in a respectful manner by providing regular financial support, monetary gifts before Yom Tov, or occasional financial help. Even years later.
- 11 If she is in need of financial help but uncomfortable accepting, think of creative ways to ease her financial burden without compromising her dignity.
- 12 Offer her rides to simchos, especially if she doesn’t drive, but even if she does.

- 13 Commit to paying one of her bills every month.
- 14 Help her work out the practical and financial details of making her children's simchos. Assist with planning and shopping.
- 15 Offer a prepared meal during hectic times.
- 16 Take her children on outings with your family.
- 17 Offer to help her with errands. "I'll be running errands today, what is on your list that I can take care of for you?"
- 18 On the day of her child's simcha, drive her to the hall.
- 19 File her taxes.
- 20 Help with carpool. Offer to pick up her kids when you pick up your own (and even when you aren't picking up your own.)
- 21 Send her a landscaper and handyman for household repairs and maintenance.
- 22 Offer her the use of your vacation home.
- 23 Babysit her children so she can go on vacation.
- 24 Give her gift cards to buy takeout.
- 25 Bring over a cooked meal- or even a side dish- without being asked.
- 26 Take her kids out on big dates like anniversaries, birthdays, or the yartzeit so she has space to mourn.
- 27 Help her write a resume and find a job.
- 28 Send your teenage daughters to help with childcare.
- 29 Help with her young children at family simchos.
- 30 Pick her up and walk with her to and from shul.

## PRACTICAL SUPPORT

“A friend calls from the grocery store and says ‘Hi, I’m in the store, do you need anything?’ My husbands helped with the shopping and I find this very supportive not only in a practical way, but also emotionally.”

“The best people were those who invited and offered and did not take offense when rejected but asked how, if possible, to make the invite or offer more palatable for you and then had patience to wait it out WITH you - in your time frame and in your way.”



## AROUND THE YEAR

Keep her and her family  
in mind throughout the  
Jewish calendar.



### TISHREI

Offer early invites to Yom Tov Seudos.

Put up her Succah.

Purchase Arba Minim sets.

Invite her to join you on Chol  
Hamoed trips.

Pick her up for shul on Simchas Torah.  
Include her sons in the dancing.

Take down her succah after Yom Tov.



### KISLEV

Invite her for dinner on Chanukah.



### ADAR

Visit Purim night with your family.



### NISSAN

Offer early invites to Yom Tov Seudos.

Order her matzah and wine.

Kasher her kitchen.

Help her sell the chometz.

Offer to clean her car

Bring her kids along to biur chometz.

Invite her to join you on Chol  
Hamoed trips.

Host her family for the Pesach seder.  
Include her children in the seder.



### SIVAN

Offer early invites to Yom Tov Seudos.

Help make arrangements for her boys  
to learn Shavuot night.



### ELUL

Take her boys to selichos.



### EREV YOM TOV

Take her kids out for a few hours.

Call to check in.

Send a gift and/or card to tell her  
you're thinking of her.





## MEN-ORIENTED TASKS

### HOW MALE RELATIVES AND FAMILY FRIENDS CAN PITCH IN

- Bring her garbage cans to the curb.
- Shovel her walk and steps when it snows.
- Accompany her boys to minyan. Even better, pick them up so they don't have to walk in alone.
- Leave her your phone number and let her know she can call if she needs assistance.
- Offer to help with her children's Shidduchim, including asking information from Roshei Yesiva, Chavrusos, etc.
- Help with changing light bulbs and other household repairs.
- Take her car to the mechanic.
- Help with lawn maintenance.
- If appropriate, offer guidance on choosing yeshivos for her sons. Help prepare them for farhers.
- Offer to learn with her sons.
- Offer help with new experiences, such as purchasing a car and making a wedding.
- Help purchase tefillin for her son and help prepare him for his Bar Mitzvah.
- Take her boys along when you go with your sons to do "boy stuff."

“My brother-in-law promised to help me when my young children would be in Shidduchim.”

“My neighbor would come shmooze with my boys Friday nights after the seudah and took an interest in them.”

“One neighbor shovels our snow before we even look outside. To me this is their way of saying that we understand that your situation is challenging, and we are thinking about you.”

## WHAT SHE WISHES YOU WOULD KNOW

*“ My husband had many friends from work, shul, etc. I wish they would sometimes think to check up on his family. He was always there for them! ”*

*“ When I sat shiva my whole block was very giving and arranged meals. For about 3 months after, some women came over to visit on Shabbos or Friday night. All that came to an end after that. I wish families would invite me on a more steady basis or visit. ”*

*“ Under our strength (real or not so real) there is always a sense of fragility. ”*

*“ Please don't forget about me or treat me like I'm invisible - I am still the same person as before! ”*

*“ We want to hear that our spouse is missed and was important to you. ”*

*“ If your child needed his father's help with preparing for a Gemara test, or a science project, think of my child, and offer to be of help. ”*

*“ The loss is not in the past. It is excruciating today years later. Each day brings up a “new loss,” such as when a child learns something new but there is no one to share it with. Or no one asks when I'm sad or happy. When the death happens people are supportive but years later most people disappeared. Don't assume we are okay. Any small act that you can do would be so appreciated. ”*

*“ Keep inviting, even if I don't accept. ”*

*“It may be a few years later and I may still be struggling. There’s no timeline on grief. Even if I look fine or like I have things under control, it’s still nice to get help. I have all this responsibility and I have my kids to take care of but who is nurturing me?”*

*“Reach out. Even if you don’t know what to say, say, “I have been thinking about you. I would like to (visit, take you out for coffee, bring you dinner....)- is that OK?”*

*“Mourning doesn’t miraculously end at the first yartzeit.”*

*“Don’t be insulted if I turn down invitations for Shabbos or Yom Tov. At least for me, being in my home gives me chiyus. My husband is not here, but I still have a strong Bayis, which I try to infuse with as much simcha as I can.”*

*“I am so lonely. Ask me how I’m managing even if it’s a few years.”*

*“Think of your own nisyonos. How much would it bother you to hear of the bounty and good fortune of others in an area where you have losses or struggles? Then you’ll better be able to communicate to an almanah with compassion and not make her feel excluded.”*

*“Please don’t ask questions because even I don’t have the answers...”*

*“Please work on shidduchim for me.”*

*“Just listen, you don’t have to talk. Don’t try to fix my hole, just listen to me.”*

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# COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

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## PLEASE DO NOT:

- Ask me questions
- Tell me to focus on the good in my life
- Treat my boys differently in shul
- Mention your husband in our conversations
- Ask me about remarriage unless we are very close
- Tell me that you understand what I'm going through
- Say, "You're always welcome for a Shabbos meal." Offer a genuine invitation
- Stop calling because you don't know what to say
- Ask me personal questions that you wouldn't ask a woman who wasn't widowed
- Ask me what I'm doing for Shabbos/Yom Tov/ the summer, etc.
- Invite me for Shabbos on Friday morning
- Address your simcha invitations to my husband
- Share information about my children with my parents, in-laws and siblings
- Make a sad face when you see me and rub my arm
- Avoid talking about my husband
- Forget about me, even if my loss happened years ago. I still live with it every day
- Ask, "Is there anything I can do?" Offer something specific
- Compare my loss to someone else's or to a loss of your own
- Avoid me
- Betray my privacy by sharing our conversations with my parents or siblings
- Pressure me to accept your invitations and offers
- Talk about my loss when we are in public
- Let technology replace real human interactions
- Assume that I can't make decisions for myself
- Treat my children differently than their peers in school. Just be extra sensitive
- Forget to invite me to your simchos now that I'm alone
- Give me advice unless I ask for it

FOUND THIS HELPFUL?

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## WATCH THE VIDEO

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**“THERE FOR HER:  
Secrets to Supporting Your  
Widowed Relative or Friend”**

Gain insight from Samchainu’s founders, and hear answers to commonly asked questions about how to support a friend or relative who lost her husband.

A valuable resource for the community, this video is available free of charge on our website and can be accessed by scanning the QR code below.

[www.samchainu.org/thereforher](http://www.samchainu.org/thereforher)

SCAN FOR THE VIDEO





## MEET SAMCHAINU'S LEADERSHIP TEAM

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### SHANI WALDMAN CO-FOUNDER

Shani was 37 years old when she lost her husband. She was left with six young daughters, including a baby. Despite the isolation and loneliness, she was determined to create a life of joy for her family. Together with Breindy Halberstam, Shani co-founded Samchainu to support and nurture Orthodox widows. Today, Shani remains passionate about creating a world for almanos where they can learn to live and feel happy again, and to truly experience joy in the new life in which they find themselves. Shani devotes hours of her time to counseling and encouraging almanos of any age and stage.

### BREINDY HALBERSTAM CO-FOUNDER

When Breindy lost her husband at fifty years old, she was left with a gaping void- and a crammed daily schedule. Being a single parent for her three young sons at home, for her six relatively young married couples, and keeping up her demanding schedule as an accounting professor in Touro College and as a High School English teacher didn't seem to leave her with much time. But then, co-founding Samchainu together with Shani Stefansky (now Waldman) became a central part of her life. It is Breindy's greatest joy to bring her fellow widows true understanding and genuine companionship, along with a generous dose of fun!

## MEET SAMCHAINU'S RABBINIC ADVISORY BOARD

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RABBI YAAKOV BENDER  
SHLIT" A

Rabbi Bender is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Darchei Torah of Far Rockaway. Rabbi Bender lost his father at age fifteen and has a special place in his heart for Samchainu families.



RABBI YOSEF EISEN  
SHLIT" A

Rabbi Yosef Eisen is the Rav of Kollel B'nei Torah in Flatbush & Administrator of the Va'ad Hakashrus of the Five Towns. As a young child, Rabbi Eisen lost his father. His timely shiurim are enjoyed by hundreds of members.



RABBI NOSSON MULLER  
SHLIT" A

Rabbi Muller is the Menahel of Yeshiva Tiferes Tzvi in Chicago. A tireless advocate for children, Rabbi Muller's dedication to every Samchainu mother has earned him the title, "The Samchainu Rebbe."

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# THANK YOU

## FOR CARING

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### ABOUT SAMCHAINU

Samchainu enhances the lives of over 2,900 widowed women and their families across North America and beyond. Our vast array of services include 2 yearly Shabbosim, 5 annual retreats, live and zoom support groups, Yom Tov events, loss support packages, financial assistance, seasonal gifts, weekly calls, and myriad other programs and resources.

Please help us continue our vital work by making a donation to further our mission of bringing joy back to life.

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SCAN TO DONATE

