

After the Accident

Friend & Family Support

1. DO get one person (hopefully someone close to the family) to act as liaison in the case of deaths or serious injuries. If you are close to the family, offer your services. Anxious or grief-stricken families don't need dozens of phone calls from people asking, "What can I do to help?", and they're usually too dazed to answer an open-ended question like that anyway.
2. DO keep calls and visits short unless the injured person or family specifically asks you to stay. You don't need prepared words of cheer or wisdom. If you're hesitant to call or visit, send a card or an email. (Families can print emails and deliver them to the hospital.) Little things mean a lot.
3. DO offer specific help. See the "Support Checklist" for suggestions.
4. DON'T ask "What happened?" (they've already told this story a million times; if they want to tell it again they'll bring it up!); "Was he/she wearing a helmet?" (what's the point now?); "How long has he/she been riding?" (think about the implication); or "Are you going to keep riding?"
5. DON'T share your own (or someone else's) accident story unless you've carefully thought it through. Injured people are, of necessity, self-centered as their bodies struggle to recover, and they really don't care about other people's experiences. Plus, many "happy ending" accident stories include hidden pitfalls that can increase the injured person's anxiety, like the mention of complications that set in. The last thing a struggling survivor wants to think about is the potential for future complications!
6. DON'T make comments about the injured person's appearance unless he/she initiates it (and even then resist the impulse to make good-natured jokes). Bike crashes can leave faces bruised, grossly swollen and stitched, and even tough guys can be sensitive about their appearance.

SUPPORT CHECKLIST

1. Send a pre-paid calling card instead of (or along with) flowers or a plant. Cell phones often don't work inside hospitals, so long-distance calls to keep relatives updated can cost serious money.
2. Prepare a "Hospital Basket" if the family of a badly injured rider is having to live in the waiting room. Here are some suggested items to include:
3. Comfort & Energy Foods: cereal/snack bars, brownies, mixed nuts, packaged cheese & crackers, peanut butter & crackers, herbal tea bags, non-messy fruit, mints.
4. Refreshers: a couple fine terrycloth washcloths, non-hospital face soap, eye soother pads, "toothpaste" type gum.
5. General: a notepad & pencil (good for phone messages), stationery set with stamps, pre-paid phone card, crossword book, a few new magazines.
6. Arrange meals for the hospital. After a day or two of hospital cafeteria food, families trapped in waiting rooms are grateful for anything different. Don't feel like you have to make a home-cooked meal! Pick up BBQ, KFC, or about anything that's not available on hospital grounds. Just keep in mind that whatever you bring is likely to be eaten over a period of hours, so avoid mayonnaise-based foods like potato salad and coleslaw that can go bad. Don't forget foam or plastic plates, napkins, forks, etc.
7. Arrange meals for the home. Even if the injured rider isn't critical, or has been released from the hospital, it doesn't mean he/she has the food thing covered. Getting well is draining (and helping someone you love get well is sometimes worse!). Even a couple meals a week can be a big help to families at this stage, especially if they have kids.
8. Offer other specific assistance: babysitting, pet-sitting, house-sitting, plant-sitting, picking up kids from school, picking up medicine from the drugstore, housecleaning or maid service, mowing the lawn, driving to doctor's appointments, filling out insurance forms, overseeing bike repairs, paying bills, writing thank-you notes.
9. For critical patients out of ICU but still needing family present, offer to go sit in the hospital room for a couple hours so the family can take a much-needed break. Get all their emergency numbers and promise to call them instantly if there's any hint of a problem.

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