

## Writing a Sympathy Card Leaves Many of Us at a Loss

By Gail Rink

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I've written and collected my share of sympathy cards over the years; both personal and those related to my work at [Hospice of Santa Barbara](http://www.hospiceofsantabarbara.com). Writing a sympathy card is probably among the more difficult tasks that any of us will have. (Reading them isn't any easier.)

**OPEN ARMS**  
*Coping with loss,  
embracing healing*



**GAIL RINK**  
Executive Director of  
Hospice of Santa Barbara  
[www.hospiceofsantabarbara.com](http://www.hospiceofsantabarbara.com)

We are so concerned about putting down in writing the correct sentiment that we can become paralyzed with anxiety in the process. In the hopes of making this task a little easier, I'd like to offer the community these guidelines:

- As a general rule, sympathy notes should be short.
- Use personal stationery or an appropriate sympathy card and a pen with blue or black ink.
- It is fine to say how much you will miss the deceased, but keep in mind that “you” are not the subject.
- “Our thoughts and prayers are with you,” while often used, is actually quite meaningful.
- Use the actual name of the deceased in the sympathy card.
- Do not write that “it was his/her time” or “time heals all wounds” or “he/she is in a better place.” These expressions do not make the bereaved feel any better.
- Address the letter to the deceased's closest relative, such as the widow or eldest child, if you knew the deceased well but did not know the family well. If you did not know the deceased, write to the relative with whom you are acquainted and express your wish to give comfort, even if he or she is not the closest relative.
- Express sympathy for the family and acknowledge their loss: "Please accept my sympathy for the loss of your father."
- Include a personal memory and/or acknowledge the character and accomplishments of the deceased. If you did not know the deceased, you can simply say, "It must have been wonderful to have him (or her) in your life."
- Offer support and assistance in any way needed if you know the person to whom you are writing.
- Avoid dwelling on the details of the death.

[Click here](#) for more information on Hospice of Santa Barbara or call 805.563.8820.

*Gail Rink, MSW, is executive director of [Hospice of Santa Barbara](#).*