



The Compassionate Friends Victoria, Australia

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Grief and the Healing Process

When a child dies, no matter what their age or the cause of death, grief lasts far longer than society in general recognises. The death of your child is an unacceptable tragedy and it can take a long time before you regain any sense of normality in your life.

Grieving is hard work, you will be experiencing emotions on a deeper level than you have ever done before. You will feel more physically tired than usual. You may feel helpless, hopeless, and unable to concentrate or handle your usual day to day routine. Loss of appetite and sleeplessness can make this worse, leaving you feeling out of control and confused. These are all normal reactions to grief.

Crying is an acceptable and healthy expression of grief for ALL family members and helps to release built up tensions. Tears do help in the healing process. The amount of tears, however, is not the measure of the depth of love.

GUILT

Guilt is a normal part of grief, surfacing in thoughts and feelings of 'if only'. In order to resolve this guilt try to express and share these feelings and learn to forgive yourself.

ANGER

Anger is another common grief reaction, anger at professionals, life, God and even your child. Like any other emotion anger needs to be expressed and shared in a healthy acceptable manner. Talking these feelings over with a trusted person can help.

RELATIONSHIPS

Family relationships are changed by the death of a child. Each person grieves in their own way and in their own time. Be sensitive to the fact that your partner may grieve in a different way to you. Some people grieve openly, others privately and alone. Surviving brothers and sisters may also withdraw or show aggressive behaviour. Their school work may suffer from an inability to concentrate. Be as patient and loving as you can.

SPIRITUAL MATTERS

After a child's death, parents often challenge and examine their faith or philosophy of life. Some people find their faith helps them to accept the unacceptable, others do not. Try to find a caring non-judgemental member of your faith to discuss this with.

COUNSELLING

A parent may feel they have nothing to live for and many think about release from the intense pain. Be assured that parents often feel this way, but in time the intense pain does lessen and a sense of purpose and meaning does return. Talk to someone you trust, and if these feelings persist you may find professional counselling helpful.

SOME SUGGESTIONS

Avoid hasty decisions. During the early months of grieving it would be unwise to make any major irreversible decisions such as moving house, changing your job or dealing with your child's belongings. Take time to consider how you may feel later about this decision.

Allow your family and friends to help. Most people are unsure of what is helpful and may need you to take the initiative and tell them what you want. Give them the opportunity to get close and be of help if they wish to.

While it is normal to feel afraid for the safety of other family members, especially surviving children, try to minimise the desire to over protect them. Allow time to feel sad and reflective.

Medication is best taken sparingly and only under the management of your doctor. Special days, such as birthdays, anniversaries, family days, can be very difficult. Often the lead up to these days can be worse than the day itself. It is helpful to plan new rituals and ways to remember your child on these 'special' days.

You, your family and friends can support each other by talking about your child, help, sharing memories and feelings in an open non-judgemental way.

It may be helpful to keep a journal and write about your feelings and thoughts, write a letter to your child who has died.

It is important to take care of yourself. Grief work is the hardest work you will ever do.

Take time for things that may help you relieve some of the stress in your life. Many people find gardening or walking a great help, other suggestions include meditation, swimming, massage etc. Find something that suits you.

Attending a grief support group can be helpful. You will meet others who understand. As you tell your story you will share an understanding of the heart that goes deeper than words. Their survival is reassuring proof that you too will survive

Remember that, as long as it harms neither yourself nor others, there is no right or wrong way to grieve, no timetable for grief. We are unique individuals and we express our love and our pain uniquely. Above all, give yourself time. It takes time to open your heart and mind to healing; to choose to survive.