

## Understanding Grief

Grief, with its many ups and down, last for longer than society in general recognizes. Be patient with yourself.

Each person's grief is individual. You and your spouse will experience it and cope with it differently.

Crying is an acceptable and healthy expression of grief and releases built-up tension for mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters. Cry freely as you feel the need.

Physical reactions to the death of a child may include loss of appetite or overeating, sleeplessness, and sexual difficulties. Parents may find that they have very little energy and cannot concentrate. A balanced diet, rest, and moderate exercise are especially important for the whole family at this time.

Avoid the use of drugs and alcohol. Medication should be taken sparingly and only under the supervision of your physician. Many substances are addictive and can lead to a chemical dependence. In addition, they may stop or delay the necessary grieving process.

Friends and relatives may be uncomfortable around you. They want to ease your pain but do not know how. Take the initiative and help them learn how to be supportive to you. Talk to your child so they know this is appropriate.

Whenever possible, put off major decisions (changing residence, changing job etc.) for at least a year.

Avoid making hasty decisions about your child's belongings. Do not allow others to take over or to rush you. You can do it little by little whenever you feel ready.

Parents may feel they have nothing to live for and may think about a release from this intense pain. Be assured that many parents feel this way but that a sense of purpose and meaning does return. The pain does lessen.

Guilt, real or imagined, is a normal part of grief. It surfaces in thoughts and feelings of "if only". In order to resolve this guilt, learn to express and share these feelings, and learn to forgive yourself.

Anger is another common reaction to loss. Anger, like guilt, needs expression and sharing in a healthy and acceptable manner.

Children are often the forgotten grievers within a family. They are experiencing many of the same emotions you are; so share thoughts and tears with them. Though it is a painful time, be sure they feel loved and included.

Holidays and the anniversaries of your child's birth and death can be stressful times. Consider the feelings of the entire family in planning how to spend the day. Allow time and space for your emotional needs.

A child's death often causes a parent to challenge and examine his faith or philosophy of life. Don't be disturbed if you are questioning old beliefs. Talk about it. For many, faith offers help to accept the unacceptable.

It helps to become involved with a group of parents having similar experiences; sharing eases loneliness and promotes the expression of your grief in an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding.

**BEREAVED PARENTS AND THEIR Families CAN FIND HEALING AND HOPE FOR THE FUTURE AS THEY REORGANIZE THEIR LIVES IN A POSITIVE WAY.**

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