

Parent Grief after the Death of a Child

The unimaginable has happened. Parents never expect to outlive their children.

Whether you were present for your child's final moments, or you received a phone call that shattered your world, the reality of their death is a shock. You may be surprised by the range of your reactions. As you experience your grief, remember not to judge yourself and try not to judge the way your family is reacting. Everyone will respond differently at different times.

Remember that...

- * The death of a child can shake the strongest of families to the core.
- * There is no specific set of emotions that you "should" be feeling.
- * Regardless of the nature of your relationship, your child was your child.
- * Grief comes and goes and may fluctuate every day, every hour, or vary according to your surroundings or circumstances

Bereaved parents travel a unique journey...

In addition to the wide variety of typical physical and emotional expressions of grief, here are some that are specific to the death of a child:

- * You may feel stigmatized, isolated, and hopeless.
- * The death of your child defies your expectation of the natural order of things.
- * It may feel as though other parents don't understand and don't say the right thing.
- * You may be riddled with unanswerable questions, trying to make sense of your child's death.
- * Questions about your life purpose may arise.
- * You may find yourself wondering:
 - o *Who am I now?*
 - o *Am I still a mother/father?*
- * Everyday questions become complicated, such as when someone asks you, "*How many children do you have?*"
- * You may experience some guilt or self-blame, telling yourself, "It was my job to take care of my child and protect them."
- * You may become over-protective of other family members.
- * You may experience secondary losses such as your child's spouse or partner remarrying or moving your grandchildren to a new city.
- * There may also be times when you need to take a break from your grief for a while.

Some things that may sustain you as you move through your journey...

- * Remember that you are not alone.
- * Connecting with other grieving parents can help you through the darkest times.
- * Maintaining a lasting connection with your child's memory can help to heal your heart.
- * Your pain will ebb and flow over time as you adapt and readjust to your new reality.

You brought your child into your life, and now you have to do the hardest thing any parent could ever be asked to do – live through their death. Be gentle with yourself, reach out for support, and know that the love you shared with your child will be part of your life forever.