

BEREAVEMENT NEWSLETTER

YES, CHILDREN GRIEVE

Grief is a family affair. It is hard to reach out to your children or grandchildren when you are experiencing so much pain yourself. For children, it may seem that they have lost you too.

Children do grieve. It is different from adult grief but just as real. They have many questions but may be afraid to ask a distressed adult. They may have fears that show up in behavior. We do children a disservice when we attempt to hide our emotions of grief. To be able to show your emotions openly helps the child accept the naturalness and pain of death.

One conversation won't do it. It is important to "stay tuned" and respond honestly to questions and observations from them. You will feel less pressure if you accept the fact that you don't have to have all the answers.

The following are a few **DO'S AND DON'TS**:

DO use the word death. Saying that "God took Grandma to heaven", "Daddy has gone on a long trip", or "Grandpa is sleeping" can cause confusion, anger, fear resentment, and guilt that will be very difficult to resolve. Children need trust and truth.

DO allow children to release their emotions. Let them name their feelings of hurt, sadness, anger, etc. Encourage them to express those feelings in a safe way. All them to pound a pillow, kick a ball, scream in the garage. Encourage them to draw a picture, write a story or poem.

DO seek help from an understanding adult, clergy, or counselor if you are unable to cope with your child's needs.

DO leave room for their doubts, questions, and differences of opinion. It is okay to say, "I have questions too. That's why we need to talk together and help each other."

DO give assurance of love and support. Children may feel that you are angry with them. They want to do something to help. Letting them know that their hugs are important when you are sad relieves them of a feeling of helplessness.

DO spend time remembering good times, looking at pictures, recalling special family vacations and things the deceased person did with the child.

DO help your child find ways to commemorate your loved one. Children like ritual. Planting a tree and caring for it, letting balloons loose at the cemetery, remembering the loved one in evening prayers, etc. are some suggestions. Ask for the child's ideas too.

DO NOT suggest or encourage the child to assume a different role, such as "man of the house" or "little mother" or an equal companion. Some children feel they need to "replace" a sibling who died. Children may hear that from others or slide into the role on their own, but it is important for them to remain the child.

DO NOT feel it is up to you to help your child "get over" the grief. Each child's grief is as unique as your own. With love and support, they will find healing in their own time.

Hospice of Siouxland offers "Good Grief", a program of education and support for children. This takes place during the summer. Children, ages 6-16, are served by this program. You may call a bereavement coordinator at 233-4144 for additional information.

*"I've come to believe that anything human is mentionable,
and anything mentionable can be manageable."*

*Mr. Rogers (Neighborhood)
Explaining why he had a program for children that dealt with death.*

When An Adult Child Dies

By Kenneth J. Doka
Editor of "Journeys", published by Hospice Foundation of America

"If Joe were 5 years old instead of 45," Josie remarked, "then maybe everyone would understand my grief". Josie's comment reflects the problems that many parents face when an adult child dies. While the loss of a child of any age is devastating, often support and understanding from others are diminished if the child is an adult.

Children are not supposed to die before their parents. When they do, it may shatter beliefs and assumptions about the world. The world may seem like a more dangerous place. Parents, too, may feel guilty about surviving the child.

There may be a sense of unfinished business. Frank's daughter, Jenn, was "daddy's little girl". As she got older, they still got along well. But when Jenn died, Frank felt bad that "it had been a long time since I really made a fuss over her, told her I loved her".

There are issues unique to the death of an adult child. One is support: Others may not recognize how much the parents are affected. Some may even make remarks like "at least you

got to raise him or her”. While that may be true, the bonds between a parent and child remain strong. Relationships may even be stronger now that they no longer share living space and are relating to one another as adults. Support, too, may be focused elsewhere. Your child may have left a spouse or children. Everyone, yourself included, may be focused on their grief.

While each person’s grief is unique, a few principles may help you as you cope with the death of an adult child:

Acknowledge your own grief. While seeking to help others, recognize that this loss deeply affects you. Your ability to help others will be affected by how well you attend to your own grief.

Seek out support. You may find it valuable to be with others who have experienced similar losses. Groups such as “The Compassionate Friends” are for parents who have had children of all ages die. These groups offer a safe place to talk about your grief, suggestions for coping, and reassurance that others share your responses.

Grieve together. You may be reluctant to share your grief. You may want to protect survivors from your pain. Yet this just leaves everyone to grieve alone. Sharing stories, memories, and rituals can be helpful to everyone. At the same time, remember and respect that each person grieves in his or her own way. Even when we grieve together, it does not mean that we have to grieve alike.

MEMORIES

By Darcie D. Sims

Excerpts from “If I Could Just See Hope”

Memories are our treasures...even those which cause us pain have a place in who we are. We are the sum of everything that has gone before us. We pass on our memories from one generation to another. We are the carriers of the torch, passed through stories, through songs, through touch. We pass on to those who will come after us, the joys and trials of living...of coping with whatever comes our way as best we can. We become another link in the chain of humanity, a memory trace from the very beginning to the very end. No one can remember it all, but we each have a small piece of the treasure to safe guard for the next heart to hear.

Whatever your memories are, cherish them. If they bring pain and grief, listen to them, learn from them, but do not abandon them. If they bring peace and comfort, listen to them. If they bring tears and confusion, listen to them as well. For whatever else memories bring, they bring the past to the present, and we carry them with us to the future in whatever way we choose. You can release the pain of your memories, but only if you will remember them. You can release the terror, the terribleness, but only if you allow them to simply come to light.

Memory...cherish it...it creates the threads of our fabric...our history. And if we know where we have been, we might be able to figure out where we are, and where we are going.

Other Resources You Might Find Helpful:

For Teens:

What Makes Me Feel This Way? By Eda LeShan. Deals with a variety of feelings which young people (ages 12-17) may experience and how to understand them.

Straight Talk About Death for Teenagers by Earl A. Grollman. This book has a simple, direct style but covers a lot.

For Children:

The Grieving Child: A Parent's Guide by Helen Fitzgerald. Gives many practical ideas on ways parents can help their children work through grief.

My Grandpa Died Today by J. Fassler. The story about a boy whose grandfather died peacefully after talking with the boy about it.

Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs by T. DePaola. The grandmother dies and the boy tells about his feelings.

The Tenth Good Thing About Barney by Judith Viorst. In an attempt to overcome his grief, a boy tries to think of the ten best things about his dead cat.

Badger's Parting Gifts by Susan Varley. Badger's friends are sad when he dies, but they treasure the legacies he left them.

Aarvy the Aardvark Finds Hope by Donna O'Tool. Aarvy Aardvark comes to terms with the loss of his mother. A wonderful story of loss and grief. It needs an adult to translate the animal story into human terms and to the child's particular situation.

The Fall of Freddy the Leaf by Leo Buscalia. Good for all ages. Shows the life cycle through nature.

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