



Bereaved Parents of the USA

To Bereaved Grandparents—

When a child dies, others often focus attention on the child's parents. Grandparents, unfortunately, seem to be forgotten in other's concern for the immediate family members. Yet a grandparent's grief is very real and deeply painful. Additionally, grandparents suffer much pain and frustration in watching their own child's agony while being unable to alleviate that anguish or to ease the weeks and months of continuing grief.

As a bereaved grandparent, you face two tasks:

- to work through your own grief,
and
- to be helpful to your bereaved child.

For the sake of simplicity, let us discuss these two aspects separately; but generally, of course, both tasks demand attention simultaneously.

You will find working through your own grief very difficult. Understandably, you may want to put your grief aside in order to comfort your bereaved child. Yet you must find time to grieve yourself. Grieving involves three elements:

- learning about the grief process,
- finding a good support group or system, and
- understanding that what you are experiencing is normal.

You can learn about the grief process through many excellent books and articles currently available at your local library, bookstore, or through the Bereaved Parents of

the U.S.A. website. Reading good material will help you to understand both your own grief experience and that of your bereaved child.

The second element is also essential. Nearly all grieving people need support—someone who will listen over and over again without judging. Finding this kind of support is frequently difficult for bereaved grandparents. Be sure that you find someone who will allow you to express your emotions and allow you to talk about your grandchild. Bereavement support groups are especially helpful in this regard.

Working through grief depends upon:

- reassurance that when you feel crazy, you are simply experiencing a normal part of the grief process, and
- realizing that you are not wallowing in self-pity when you have legitimate pain. You loved your grandchild, and his or her death brings you deep anguish. Openly expressing that pain helps to ease it.

A special note: The intensity of your grief will rarely last as long as your child's. Your pain in seeing your child's despair, however, will not end until he or she has worked through grief and is once again comfortable with his or her life. To watch this process is an especially difficult aspect of a grandparents' grief.

The second task facing you as a grandparent is to be helpful to your grieving child—a nearly impossible task.

You cannot *kiss it and make it better* as you could with a skinned knee years ago. You must realize that your child's grief will follow a long and hard path. You cannot do your child's grief work for him or her.

Avoid statements such as count your blessings, or he's in heaven with God, or think of your other children. Such statements will do nothing to alleviate anyone's pain, and may actually hurt or alienate your grieving child.

You must allow your child to grieve in his or her own way and in his or her own time. Don't tell your child what he or she should or should not do or feel. Rather, you should listen to your child's expressions of grief, love, and remembrances. A hug or holding hands, even in silence, can be powerfully comforting.

You should know also that parental grief may well consume several years to find resolution, nor will progress move steadily upward. You can be helpful by providing opportunities to support your bereaved child in special ways:

- encourage an open expression of grief as healthy and helpful,
- offer to stay with surviving grandchildren to give your child and his or her spouse some time alone, and
- if you're able, offer assistance with household chores, especially in the first few months after the death when your bereaved child's physical energy will be drained by grief's emotional turmoil.

Helping your bereaved child in these ways provides a rare opportunity to cement a deep and lasting bond between you, your child, his or her spouse, and any surviving grandchildren.

In honor of all bereaved grandparents

The Bereaved Parents of the USA is a non-profit, self-help organization that offers friendship, support and understanding to bereaved parents (including foster and step-parents), grandparents and siblings after the death of a child, grandchild or sibling regardless of the age of the child or the cause of death. Individuals differ but are all alike in seeking ways to overcome grief. Grieving people can adjust and life eventually can have meaning again.

Other brochures which are available are:

- *For The Newly Bereaved*
- *Sudden Death*
- *Prolonged Illness*
- *Suicide*
- *When a Child Dies: What Medical Personnel Can Do*
- *Emergency Personnel: How to Help the Family After the Sudden Illness, Injury or Death of a Child*

For further information, contact BP/USA at PO Box 95, Park Forest, IL 60466 or by calling 708-748-7866. Our website, www.bereavedparentsusa.org is also available on the internet. You may find out about chapter locations and other groups which offer help

and you may read the current and past newsletters and other publications and brochures there. Information about our annual Gathering is also posted on the web.

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