

Bereaved Parents of the USA



*Offering Support, Care and Compassion for Bereaved Parents,
Siblings and Grandparents Following the Death of a Child*

Bereaved Parents of the USA

Bereaved Parents of the USA (BP/USA) is a nationwide organization designed to aid and support bereaved parents and their families who are struggling to survive their grief after the death of a child.

Membership in BP/USA shall be limited to persons who have experienced the death of a child, brother, sister or grandchild. Step-parents, step-brothers and sisters shall also be eligible. Other individuals who have functioned in a parental capacity and who have experienced the death of those children shall also be eligible for membership. All eligible persons who attend local Chapter meetings or events or National Gatherings, or otherwise express an interest in membership shall be considered Members. Members are free to attend monthly meetings of their chapter, or any other chapter, as often and as long as necessary to meet their needs.

Goals of the BP/USA

It is the goals of BP/USA

- To educate families about the grief process and all its complexities as it applies to the death of a child at any age and from any cause.
- To aid and support those who are suffering such a loss, regardless of race, creed or financial situation.
- To provide monthly meetings with sharing groups and occasional informative programs.
- To provide a library at each meeting place where members may borrow books with up-to-date information about the grief process.
- To supply the telephone numbers of other bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents who are able to offer support to other more newly bereaved families.
- To inform and educate members of the helping professions who interact with bereaved parents as to the nature and duration of parent/sibling/grandparent bereavement.

Why BP/USA Exists

Most families feel a need, after they have endured the most severe of life's crisis, to have some order restored in their lives. BP/USA provides an atmosphere where personal change, growth and resolution of grief are most apt to occur.

Funding

There are no dues charged to belong to BP/USA. Voluntary donations may be made to either the parent organization and/or the local chapters to help with expenses. All gifts are tax deductible.

BP/USA is Non-denominational

There is no religious creed involved. Members are free, however, to state their beliefs and the role those beliefs have played in their lives.

Members are at all stages of recovery and fluctuate among them. Some have deep religious faith, other have lost their faith, while still others are adrift

How BP/USA Works

Attendance at the meetings brings together newly bereaved parents and those who are farther along in their grief and have worked through many of their grief-related issues.

Although most parents feel isolated in the beginning, the group helps them to know they haven't been singled out for this unspeakable hurt. The most important thing our meetings have to offer are members who listen with true empathy. They listen as parents, siblings or grandparents relate the uniqueness of the child who has died, the events that surround the death itself, the bitterness and alienation that remain and the disappointment over anticipated support that does not materialize. All are reassured that there isn't a reason to hurry the hurt along, as some non-bereaved suggest.

Hearing "I know" and "I felt that way too" is reassuring. However, parents learn that each person's grief experience is unique to that individual. Those attending soon come to know that there is no right or wrong way to grieve, nor is there a timetable in grief.

BP/USA recognizes that not all bereaved families will need the help and support this organization offers. Some families are well supported by family and friends as they move through the grief process. Others, however, who do not have the understanding and support of the people who surround them, will find BP/USA meetings a warm, safe, understanding and comfortable place to be. There they have the opportunity to be with other families who have also experienced the death of a child and may have something beneficial to share. There is no claim that these meetings are therapy groups. Members come to recognize that healing comes gradually through the sharing and support of others with like circumstances that understand. It is recommended that you try at least two or three meetings before deciding if this type of support is for you.

Some members, after benefiting from what BP/USA offers, choose to continue attending the meetings to help the chapter in any way that they are needed. Some stay on, listening, reading, facilitating, attending conferences and learning. They have seen a lot of pain and a lot of healing. These invaluable members have received much more than they have given and we call them 'wounded healers' or 'seasoned grievers'.

For the Newly Bereaved

Most bereaved parents experience one or more of the following:

- Feel physically exhausted, have difficulty sleeping, do not want to go to sleep or get up.
- Feel tightness in the throat, heaviness in the chest, or a lump in the stomach like a rock.
- Have an empty feeling with appetite loss.
- Wander aimlessly, forget a thought in the middle of a sentence, neglect to finish tasks, feel restless, look for activity, but can't concentrate.
- Have respiratory reactions—excessive yawning, gasping, hyperventilating, and sighing.
- Experience feelings of anxiety.
- Think they are losing their mind
- Say to oneself: "If only I had . . ."
- Keep asking: "Why?"
- Feel they don't want to go on.
- Feel the loss isn't real, that the child will return.
- Sense the loved one's presence by expecting the child to walk in the door or phone at the usual time. Hear the voice or see the face.
- Look for the child in a crowd or see reminders unexpectedly.
- Need to tell and retell and remember things about the child and the experience of death.
- Cry at unexpected times.
- Feel able to cope and then fall back again—a see-saw or roller coaster type of reaction.
- Feel depressed.

All of these reactions are natural and normal. It is important not to deny one's feelings, but to learn to express them. Realizing that you are not alone in having these reactions is helpful. One's balance is regained slowly through understanding and working through the grief process.

It has been said that the bereaved underestimate their ability to survive. Many bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents are proof that the self-help process in a group such as BP/USA works.

Additional Information

BP/USA publishes a national newsletter, *A Journey Together*, which periodically lists related support groups of interest to bereaved parents and families, books about parental and sibling bereavement and upcoming conferences and other opportunities for bereaved parents to meet together.

*Author – Mary Cleckley
Written in memory of Jack Cleckley,
Son of John and Mary Cleckley.*

Bereaved Parents of the USA

P.O. Box 95

Park Forest, IL 60466

Phone/Fax: 708-748-7866

www.bereavedparentsusa.org

© 1998 Bereaved Parents of the USA/Revised 2007