

For the Newly Bereaved...



A support group for parents, grandparents and siblings who have suffered the death of a child, grandchild or sibling.

IN THE BEGINNING

Your child has died and you've entered this strange new world of bereavement, where many people like you think they are losing their mind. Others, who have not had your experience, think that you will "get over" the loss of your child. Neither of these assertions is true. Eventually, when you've had the necessary time and proper support, you will find the pain will lessen, as you learn how to live with this terrible loss. You won't like it as well as the way things were before the death, but it will be better than the fresh grief. Time is of the utmost importance, as is patience. Although we tire of dealing with the sorrow of it all, we ultimately learn that no one is able to hurt with the intensity of fresh grief forever. Scars do develop where there was one raw pain. Isn't that good to know?

HOW LONG WILL THIS FEELING LAST?

You wonder how or if you can survive this devastation and how long it will take for some normalcy to return to your life. Well, there are no timetables. You will be quoted times like two years, and it is true that some people will work through the process in that length of time. It is also true that some people take a longer time, others a shorter time. It all depends on your needs and how you have dealt with other losses in your life.

SHOCK

Most of us experience shock. This can last differing times for different people. Some look back on it as a blessing, for it is nature's way of protecting us from the full impact of all that we've lost. It's difficult to imagine that anyone can physically stand it if all of that occurs at once, so nature does a kind thing. It wraps us in a protective cocoon that keeps out much of the pain. It allows us to continue functioning as we take care of the necessary things involved with the solemn task of making plans for the final rights of someone we love. Some people find themselves taking care of others during this time. Bystanders may comment on how well we are doing and admire our great strength never understanding that it was our cocoon doing its job.

DENIAL

Some people experience denial. When nature's cocoon starts disintegrating and the pain starts coming in, they try to provide their own cocoon. They do this by denying that the death has taken place. "He's not dead. He's visiting Grandmother," or "She's not dead. She's visiting with her friends." They're somewhere, but they're not dead. This is called denial, and it's a normal thing for some people to try to extend nature's cocoon. It works for a while, but that invented protective coating also dissolves. That may be when we find ourselves dealing with the reality of our loss. It doesn't get better for a while, but we've touched bottom for now.

Some people bypass these diversionary tactics. They go directly to the heart of the matter and their grief starts right away. They may be the luckier ones, for they deal right away with what has to be dealt with before their grief can soften.

ANGER

Anger is another emotion that rears its head. It is a very normal reaction when someone dear to us has died. Although society frowns on anger and doesn't understand why it happens after a death, it's nothing that we should be ashamed about. The truth is, we are angry because our child has died. We look for someone to blame. It could be the doctors and nurses, if our child died in a hospital. A spouse, relatives or friends who do or say the wrong things in their efforts to comfort, may also be blamed. Then, too, our religious beliefs may have to undergo some questioning. If we had depended on God to take care of our family, we may have anger at Him for His failure, as we see it. It may take some time for us to make peace with our God. There are ways of directing your anger into positive things. Physical activity, such as hard work and sports, may help, as well as breaking dishes, screaming in the shower and anything else that relieves tension and doesn't allow anger to be turned inward and become depression. Telling our experience enough times until we've exhausted the need to tell it anymore or crying whenever and wherever a good cry helps is a good tension breaker too.

GUILT

Someone has said that if one separates grief from guilt, he/she will cut grief in half. There is much truth in that statement. Being human, none of us is totally free of regret over something large or small that was in some way connected with our children. The brain, being the devious thing that it can be at times, seems determined to punish us by recalling even the smallest thing. It makes one regret not being more capable, when making decisions, in other words, more perfect. Guilt comes from parenting instincts that say we are responsible for whatever happens to our children, good or bad. We learn that we aren't the all-powerful people that we had thought. Some think guilt is an attempt to make some sense of the senselessness of your child's death, or an answer to the unanswerable WHY. We must try to remember that we loved our child and we did the best we could. No amount of guilt ever changed anything. Excessive guilt is a wasted emotion. It is only good where planning ahead, pointless when looking back.

COMMON COMPLAINTS

Common complaints among bereaved parents include the loss of the ability to concentrate, excessive fatigue, inability to sleep or sleeping too much, loss of appetite, physical complaints, such as stomach disorders. It is good to know that time and patience will help to alleviate many of the conditions.

THE FUTURE

An aerial view of the road of grief would show us just how arduous the road really is. We go along on the straight and narrow for a short time, only to suddenly veer right or left into the steep, rough terrain of uncharted land. One can see that sometimes the road crisscrosses and returns to already traveled sections that have to be covered again. If we noted when our road made the wildest and most unexpected turns, we would see that the dates of special family-oriented events coincide with those trips deep into the hinterlands. Such times as birthdays, holidays, death dates, Mother's Day, Father's Day, season changes, school beginnings and endings, and any date that is important in a family's history, all have signs near them that clearly mark them as detours.

Although the terrain alongside us is uncharted now, this time next year it will be more familiar. At least the unknowns of the year of 'firsts' will be behind us. Isn't it good to know that one day we will emerge from this strange, new road that we have been traveling on and find ourselves back in the more familiar territory? Some of your landmarks will have changed, but there will be enough of the familiar to make us feel more comfortable. We will find we have left the most painful part of our grief back there on that road someplace.

In the meantime, go to the nearest Bereaved Parents meeting. All those there will be parents who have lost at least one child. Let the people there with more experience show how to live with the temporary “insanity” in as sane a way as possible. It is comforting to find that we can again find meaning and purpose in life after the death of a child.

*Written by Mary Cleckley
In memory of Jack Cleckley,
Son of Mary and John Cleckley*

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 available are:

- Bereaved Parents of the USA – Information
- Sudden Death
- Prolonged Illness
- For Bereaved Grandparents
- 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
- Suicide

For further information, contact BP/USA at P.O. 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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