

UNDERSTANDING GRIEF AFTER THE DEATH OF A CHILD

These guidelines have been gathered from the experiences of bereaved parents and from studies and writings of professional care givers.

- Mourning is a time of restoring emotional balance when a loved one has died.
- Grief with its many ups and downs lasts far longer than society in general recognizes. There are many factors which determine the length and intensity of grieving; be patient with yourself.
- Crying is an acceptable and healthy expression of grief and releases built-up tensions for both mothers and fathers. Cry freely as you feel the need.
- There may be awkward moments and friends and relatives may be uncomfortable around you. Take the initiative and let them know how you feel and that it is appropriate to mention the child, who has died. Socialization may be difficult for awhile.
- Physiological reactions to the death of a child may include loss of appetite or overeating, insomnia and sexual difficulties. Bereavement entails loss of energy and lack of concentration abilities for some time. Your body needs nourishment; food, rest, exercise and sunshine.
- Avoid the use of drugs and alcohol. Medications should be taken sparingly under the supervision of a physician.
- Consider whatever you do to be **NORMAL** for you. Don't be afraid of dreams or thinking for a moment that you see your child in a crowd – this is part of **NORMAL GRIEF**.
- Feelings of guilt, real or imagined, often flood parents. They surface in thoughts and feelings of “if only...” As parents, we generally do the best we can in parenting. Remember, God does forgive; you can also forgive yourself.
- Recognize the **INDIVIDUALITY** of grief. Your grief will be different and you will cope differently from your spouse or children.
- Children are often the forgotten grievers within a family. Through it is a painful time, try to make them feel **LOVED** and **INCLUDED**.
- The anniversary of your child's birth and death and holidays can be a stressful time for parents. Take into consideration the feelings of the entire family as to how the day should be spent. Do be good to yourself and allow time and space for your own emotional healing.
- Parents may feel they have nothing to live for; that they would like release from this intense pain. Be assured that many parents have similar feelings, but seldom do they act upon them. The pain does ease.

- Whenever possible, put off major decisions for at least one year; decisions such as changing place of residence or job.
- Give your faith the opportunity to grow through your religious affiliations. Questions and feelings of anger are a NORMAL part of grief. For many, faith offers the help to accept the unacceptable.
- It is helpful to become involved with a group of parents have similar experiences – it eases the feelings of LONLINESS and gives UNDERSTANDING and EXPRESSION to your grief.

Adapted from Compassionate Friends