



Bereaved Parents USA

St. Louis Chapter

INTRODUCTORY NEWSLETTER

*‘IN THE
BEGINNING...’*

**You are receiving this newsletter
because someone who cares about
you has submitted your name.**

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

BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA
P.O. BOX 95
PARK FOREST, IL 60466
PHONE & FAX (708) 748-7866
www.bereavedparentsusa.org

BEREAVED PARENT OF THE USA
ST. LOUIS CHAPTER
P.O. BOX 410350
ST. LOUIS, MO 63141
www.bpusastl.org

(314) 878-0890

'IN THE BEGINNING...'

By: Fay Harden – Tuscaloosa, AL

Your child has just died. As a newly bereaved parent you have experienced the most devastating life changing event.

Your whole world has been shattered and you are in a new world now. You will be re-learning how to survive when at times you won't even want to survive.

The only hope I can give you is that we in Bereaved Parents USA have survived and we are here to help you. It won't be easy but keep in mind, if you hadn't loved so much you wouldn't hurt so much now.

"How long will it last?" is probably the first question we hear from ones like you new to grief. It is a very important question to us at the beginning. Professionals have tried to place timetables based on their studies, and you will hear "two years" quoted, but those of us who have been down the road a number of years will tell you that you will not "get over" the death of your child in two years.

You probably never will "get over" his or her death, but you will learn to live with the fact of it and rejoin life and lead a normal life again; it will just be different from before.

There is no timetable on grief. Some work through the process sooner than others but for us who are bereaved because our child died, grief is longer and more devastating than grief from any other death in our lives.

We operate on our own individual timetable; we cannot judge our progress or lack of it by anyone else.

Grief is a process, a moving through. Sometimes we go forward, but sometimes backward, and sometimes we get "stuck" for a while, but keep in mind it is a process and eventually you will move through it.

Most of us do experience shock and denial or disbelief first. We can't believe it has happened; there must be a mistake.

This happens to other people, not us. That shock is so tremendous that it affects us physically as well as psychologically. It is marked by a lowering of blood pressure, coldness of the skin, rapid heartbeat, and an acute sense of terror. That shock insulates us and allows us to go through our duties and do things at this time that we never

could have done otherwise. I praise that shock because it keeps us from dying too. That shock allows some of us to carry on with grace and skill during the days surrounding the death and the funeral. That same shock knocks some of us into merciful oblivion and we don't remember a thing during that time. We are all individuals and we react differently during grief, but there are common reactions we all share. This is why you will find very quickly that the only one who really understands what you are going through is another bereaved parent.

Anger may come at any time. It is a very natural, normal reaction; don't be afraid or ashamed of it. Know it is okay, you won't always feel this way, there is nothing wrong with you for feeling this way – most of us feel some anger towards something, someone, even at God, even the child in some instances. You have been hurt beyond your wildest imaginings. I have described my own anger as rage. Society frowns on anger so don't expect always to be treated kindly when you display it, but remember you have a right to be angry. Anger is often unfocused and we sometimes take it out on innocent people. Medical personnel are often the first to receive this anger and funeral directors are next in line. Later that anger can attack anyone who crosses our paths. It is good to use it as a tool.

Take up social issues, find healthy outlets for it. It is important to do something physical about anger. Hard work and sports are ways, and we've heard many stories of chopping wood, buying dishes at garage sales and breaking them when we need an outlet. Scream in the shower, in your speedboat or closed up in your car, but get it out. Anger turned inward becomes depression.

With the death of our child everything we ever believed in is shattered. In my own case I had to struggle for a long time to even figure out what I *had* believed in; I was so confused. Our egos, our beliefs in ourselves, were badly shaken because, as parents, we truly believed we could protect our child from anything. We were careful, good parents, and now our child is dead. *We have failed to keep our child alive* and our ego tells us we are a failure! This devastates us; we can no longer believe in ourselves; we feel that obviously we are incapable of doing anything right. We have no self-confidence, no longer any self-esteem. These are all natural, normal responses to the horror of

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT

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

your child's death. Given time and care these feelings will pass. We will achieve a balance in our personal life again.

Remind yourself to be patient, to be kind to yourself. You are not a failure, you did the very best you could, and you would surely have given your own life to save your child's. You did not fail; life just isn't always fair.

These feelings, and others are bizarre, may cause you to think you are going crazy. Ask any bereaved parent of some years and they will tell you they thought the same thing at some time point. You are a changed person now; you will never again be the same as you were before your child died. Someday you will accept that fact. Out of the ashes of grief you can grow, if and when you choose to do so. Look around you to the other bereaved parents; you will find role models and hope in them.

There will be many tears, allow them, they are healing and necessary to survival and recovery.

Many of us suffer from the lack of ability to concentrate. It is a common complaint. We can't think, we can't remember from one minute till the next, and we have no idea what we've read. Be patient given time and effort you will return to normal.

Continued on page 3

In The Beginning...

Continued from Page 2

Hang on to any shred of your sense of humor that you can, even a small chuckle now and then can break your tension and give some relief. It may be a while in coming, but one day you will laugh again. I know you can't believe that now but you will.

You will have a strong need to talk. You will find that you can talk more than one person can listen, so seek out several good friends who will let you talk to them. You will find some at the BP/USA meetings. You will need to tell your child's story over and over again. You will need to talk about the whole life and the death and what you are going through now. Talking is therapeutic. Talk, and talk, and talk, until your story is told.

At night you may go over the events again and again, night after night. This is called obsessional review. Sleep disturbances are not unusual. We either can't sleep or sleep too much

We suffer guilt, real or imagined. We recall punishments and in turn punish ourselves with

them when at the time the punishment was probably fair. We remember things we did and things we didn't do. We go through the "if onlies." If only we had or hadn't...

Beware of isolation. We need to be with people, not alone. When we isolate ourselves with no one to talk to about our feelings, we become depressed; and isolation plus depression equals suicidal feelings, and that spells real trouble.

We are fatigued, lack motivation, we suffer numerous physical complaints, headaches, stomach disorders, we are either nervous or feel dead inside – many and sundry are our complaints, most of which are normal and to be expected in this time of enormous stress. And always we ask ourselves and others, "Why?" "Why me?" "Why my child?" Simply because life isn't always fair, my friend...

Your world is topsy-turvy now, nothing makes sense, nothing fits – family balance is upset, the numbers are all wrong, there is one too many chairs at the table now, so you choke on your food and think of

the empty chair. Grocery shopping is a nightmare because your child's favorite food greets you from the shelves of every aisle; you don't dare think of holidays because you know you'll never survive without your child. Your child's birthday and the memory of all the joy of that day loom like a mountain far too high to climb – some days all you want is for the pain to stop. Some days you just can't get out of bed. Some days you work hard and fast like something has possessed you. Every day you cry. You find you are very lonely even in the midst of a crowded shopping mall. You want to scream at the busy, happy people, "Don't you know my child is dead?" How can they go on as if nothing has happened? No matter how many people you are with, you are lonely.

Bereaved Parents USA members understand; each one of us has had at least one child die. We know what you are going through. We don't pretend to have all the answers, but we want to share this time of your life with you. We want you to know you are not alone.

What Goes On at a Meeting?

By: Pat Gollon

A question that is asked frequently of newly bereaved parents who have never attended a meeting is, "What do you do?" or rather, "What will you expect me to do?" In answer to the last question – we expect and require nothing more than your name.

Our meetings are very informal. We open the meeting with introductions, by mentioning our name and our child's name, but, if you feel you cannot do this, it is okay also.

We have all, at one time or another, choked up on the mention of our child's name or the circumstances of his/her death.

Some people attend meetings several times and do not enter any discussions or voice their feelings.

They absorb some ideas and discard others that do not meet their immediate needs.

But inevitably, someone around the table will say something that is tuned to the exact way you feel – then the realization comes that one is among friends, people who really understand and care about them and their sensitive feelings.

Some parents are more vocal right from the start and they find willing listeners who neither criticize nor pass judgment on them. We most likely have had the same feelings of anger, despair, longing, panic and a multitude of others.

Now, a word about crying...Please don't stay away because you are afraid you will cry!!

We have all cried many times. Perhaps we've attended several months and didn't shed a tear. Then, something is said or a memory comes back that brings the tears to our eyes. We can accept the gamut of feelings from tears to laughter.

Laughter? Of course! We are, after all, human and our emotions are many and varied.

There are humorous things that come up in everyday living, and thankfully, we are able to see that humor and enjoy it.

If we can accept each other's feelings, it must include all ranges of emotions.

In the course of discussions, you may hear the answer to a question or problem that has been plaguing you.

Several parents may tell how they have handled the question of what to do with their child's possessions – clothes, toys, books, etc. or how they have gotten through holidays, birthdays and other difficult days.

Maybe you will pick up something that will be helpful in dealing with your surviving children's problems; how to deal with a seemingly uncaring relative or friend; the hurtful remarks; or how to answer the questions, "How many children do you have?" Sometimes what has helped one may not have worked for another, but the importance is the open and honest discussion and chance to decide for yourself.

Continue on Page 4

Rules for Grieving: Common, But Not Making Sense

By: Margaret Gerner, MSW, CGC

In my work as a bereavement counselor for a number of funeral homes, I contact family members of the deceased approximately eight weeks after the death.

The largest percentage of these calls are what I call "I'm fine" calls. Surviving members tell me they're fine. In truth, many of them are, but many of them are not.

I hear comments such as, "I'm keeping busy so I don't have time to think about it," or "I hurt at first, but I just have to give it time." "I try not to cry in front of my family. It upsets them so much." "I'm seeing a nice woman. That helps."

Few people will admit that they are hurting.

Unfortunately, this denial of grief is all too common in our society.

Actually we have unwritten rules about it. They are: bury your feelings, replace the loss, grieve alone, and give it time.

Did you pick up any of these rules in the above comments?

We live in a fast paced society that doesn't allow us the deep, searing emotions that occur at the death of a loved one, especially at the death of a child. It's not comfortable to listen to another talk about his or her child, or cry or show us pictures of him or her. We've got to "get on with our lives," thus, the "rules."

As bereaved parents we pay a high price for those rules.

We pay the price for swallowing our emotions in illness and chronic depression that can plague us many years after our child dies. We pay the price in a prolonged sense of isolation because we can't share our pain with another. We pay the price in self-blame when that magic year mark comes and we aren't "over it."

We never stop and ask ourselves who said we have to keep busy, that crying is weakness, that talking about our deceased child is morbid; that we must think only of the good memories, or that time heals all wounds. We just take what society dictates as truth. They are not!

Ignore these rules.

Let yourself grieve in healthy ways.

Don't bury your feelings. Let them out. Get angry when you need to. Cry when you hurt. Talk out your guilt. Don't try to replace the uniqueness of your child. You can't.

Don't grieve alone. Find people who will listen, non-judgmentally, to your story told over and over. And let go of the mistaken idea that time heals. It is the grief work you do while the clock ticks away that heals.

Look at what you are being told about grief. Question who "they" are and what "they" know about grief. Don't listen to those who tell you not to grieve. Would you consult your neighbor on money matters if he were a mechanic? Would you ask an attorney about your stomach problems?

Would you ask a plumber to advise you on landscaping?

Of course you wouldn't, so why listen to those who tell you how to grieve when they have absolutely no knowledge of how to grieve or how to recover.

The loss of a beloved child creates a big change in your life.

Don't leave healthy recovery and positive personal growth to "common sense" rules. Keep in mind that while the rules may be common, they don't make sense!



GOALS OF BEREAVED PARENTS USA

The goals of Bereaved Parents USA are:

- 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 situations.
- To provide monthly meetings with sharing groups and occasional informative programs.
- To supply the telephone numbers of other bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents who are able to offer support to other 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.



What Goes On At A Meeting?

Continue from page 3

Please don't let the word "meeting" intimidate you – perhaps we should call it a gathering.

Whether our gathering consists of a program featuring a film, a speaker, listening to a tape or general discussion, please don't hesitate to join us.

The coffee pot is always on the table. Call one of our parents to arrange for a ride if needed.

Making It Through The First Year

By: Judy and Tim Taylor

Don't be afraid of your feelings and don't run away from them. You will experience many unfamiliar feelings during the first year of grief. Let yourself feel them.

Cry, be angry, express your feelings. You may experience intense pain, feelings of unreality, isolation, exhaustion, panic, fear, reality distortion, deep depression, loneliness, emptiness, anger, and guilt. You are not going crazy (which is something everyone worries about).

Grief is extremely painful, but it is the cost of commitment to those we love. Grief is a process and, as such, has a beginning and an end; it is hard work, but the only way to reach the other side of it is to go through it. Learn to flow with your feelings of grief and know that, although they are painful, they are not permanent.

Your sense of reality, your concentration will come back. You will function again, just as well as you did before, perhaps even better.

Share your feelings. For those who are verbal by nature, talking about your feelings can be an important coping tool. At first you may have a compulsion to go over the details of your child's death over and over again. But telling the story helps. Each time it is told there may be a small feeling of relief. Eventually, although you may like to talk about your child's life, you will no longer have the compulsion to review his death.

Turn to God. Your religious belief can be most sustaining. Although there may be many things we may not understand, we know that God loves us and He will, and is, giving us the strength we need to go on. If you feel anger toward God, talk to Him and express that anger. As you do so, you may find your anger dissipating and being replaced by the strength you need. God is there and He cares.

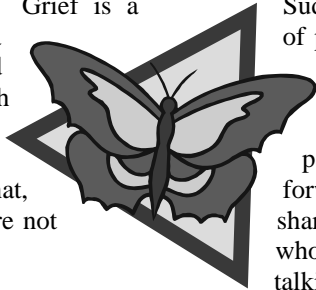
Take time in small manageable chunks. Having experienced such a traumatic event, we are injured emotionally. As in any injury it takes time to heal.

Although difficult to do, it is worth the effort to take just one day at a time. Don't borrow trouble by sitting around dreading something (like Christmas or your child's birthday), which may be 3 months down the road.

Today is all we have to worry about. During the past 18 months we discovered the days we dreaded so badly were usually not as horrible as we built them up to be.

Utilize support groups. For us, The Bereaved Parents USA has been a fantastic help. We attended the first meeting with some hesitation for fear that it might be a "pity party."

However, it had been recommended by two professionals, and we were desperate. We had been feeling totally isolated.



Suddenly we were in a room full of people who had gone through the same experience, and they were still living and surviving! As the months passed we began to look forward more and more to sharing our feelings with people who actually knew what we were talking about. There seems to be an instant bonding among people who have lost children. Because we have received so much support from BPUSA, we would like to pass on some of that help to people who come into the group newly bereaved, hurt and confused, just as we were such a short time ago.

Don't try to live up to other people's expectations. Many people will try to tell you how you "should" grieve. Don't let them. It's your child who is dead. It's your grief. There are no "shoulds" except for one. You "should" pretty much go with your own feelings and your own timetable. You must make forward progress, but no more than you are capable of dealing with. Don't let people push you to do things before you are ready. You'll know when something is right for you to do. We recently attended the Regional Conference where John Claypool, author of *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*, was the keynote speaker. He said: "Until you have been through the entire calendar, you have not experienced the full extent of the loss. You don't sow and reap in the same day. Impatience comes from people who are dealing with this grief on a much more superficial level than you." If you observe your own timing and throw out everybody else's "shoulds," you can make a terrible difficult period of time just a

little bit easier.

Don't turn to medication or alcohol.

This is extremely important. We can speak on the hazards of overmedication from personal experience. If you feel that you need counseling, make sure that the counselor you see is experienced in dealing with grief. If you feel you are being given or kept on too much medication change doctors or get a second opinion. The experience of grief is bad enough in and of itself; we don't need it complicated by dependence on medication or alcohol. There is a certain amount of grief and pain you have to endure; medication only postpones the grieving process.

Watch your health. Don't allow your health to deteriorate. The state of your health is of the utmost importance; your mind is having enough trouble dealing with the shock of the situation. Without the proper food and rest, your mind won't be able to deal with it at all. It is vital to eat a balanced diet and to get the proper amount of sleep and exercise.

Don't expect too much from your spouse. When a tragedy happens, we expect to be able to lean on our husband or wife. It is a shock to find, as Harriet Schiff says in *The Bereaved Parent*, that it is hard to lean on something that is already bent double. Learn to accept and respect each other's methods of grieving even if you don't understand.

Give each other time and space. If your spouse is having a bad day, say you're sorry, that you understand, but don't try to get him to come out of his mood, or try to entertain her to get her mind off it. This is behavior that may be resented. Communicate: really work at it. You don't have to talk all the time, but please try to remember – in most cases you and your spouse had a relationship apart from your child. Stay close together; you need each other.

Continued on Page 11

Bereaved Marriage: Areas Of Sharing

Before the death of a child, in an intact marriage both contribute to a mutually satisfying relationship. Areas of sharing before the death and lack of sharing afterwards:

1. **Family activities:** Before – what happened during the day, etc. After – there is initial sharing regarding funeral, etc. – everything relating to the child, but not to them as a couple.
2. **Emotional support:** It was a balancing act before the death with emotional support. Often there is no emotional support afterwards because each is so wrapped in individual grief. People in grief become introspective; a typical thought is “How am I going to go on.”
3. **Concern:** Before–mutual concern for each other’s well being. After – concern is turned inward.
4. **Interests:** Before – in each other’s work, hobbies, etc. After–nothing has meaning.

Males deal with grief differently than do females because they are:

1. Expected to be strong emotionally, to not show emotion, to not cry after the funeral. Society does not allow males to show anger over the death.
2. As the provider, men go back to work soon after and are away from where the memories are. They do not have as much time to think about what happened.
3. As the protector, there may be a feeling of guilt. “Have I failed to protect my child in some way?” Also, there may be a feeling of wanting to protect the spouse by not being too emotional, by being “strong.”
4. Regarding problem solving–faced with the unsolvable problem of the death, there is apt to be frustration. “What could I have done?” Men are more action oriented.
5. Men are more self sufficient, especially in the emotional area. It was emphasized that men are not apt to share very well; this hurts their ability to grieve. Men hurt as much as do women, but usually do not show it until something triggers it.

Regarding sharing feelings – a man may talk about many things – sports, politics, but rarely is there someone with whom he can share feelings. Men escape to the job,



to outside activities. It is hard to find someone with whom to share feelings. Men do not usually recognize that it is O.K. to feel depressed.

How do women grieve:

1. Society says it is OK to cry.
2. It is OK to talk about the loss. Women usually have a network with other women and men with men, but men’s network is rarely regarding the grief. Women’s network can work positively or negatively, i.e., to often those making up the network drop us because of not being able to face what has happened.
3. Women set the tone for the family. When in grief, her responses set the tone for the family atmosphere and can be devastating.
4. Women are the prime child caring persons. The mother may be the one feeling guilty because she had responsibility for the child’s every day care.
5. Women too sometimes turn to alcohol.
6. Women are given more RX’s for tranquilizers than men – (doctor’s attitudes.)

What Are The Options?

For Men:

1. Take it easy regarding outside activities. Emphasis was placed on getting into the business of grieving. Even isolate oneself at times to be able to grieve.
2. Find someone with whom to talk – another bereaved father. Don’t choose a woman because a man is too vulnerable emotionally and an unhealthy situation could develop.

3. Men are “shaky” on accepting a group experience (How well we in BPUSA know this.)
4. Be expressive – if anger is what you feel, try to channel it into something physical – i.e., be angry at something and not at a person. (In talking to one woman, she shared that her children always knew when their father was upset about their sibling’s death because he got angry at them.)
5. Daily exercise that is appropriate for the specific individual is another way of channeling aggression.
6. Make a concerted effort to learn how to cry. This is emphasized. Crying is a natural process; tear ducts have a natural purpose. Find a catalyst – a photo of your child, an article of clothing – anything that will make you cry. No one else need know about the crying – go into another room. Bill Schatz shared that it took him at least 1 ½ years before he could cry and after it was triggered by an object belonging to his child, he continued to cry in private.

For women:

1. Women need friends, especially other bereaved mothers. However, it is important to keep open the life line with at least one other who is not bereaved.
2. Schedule time away from job if you are a working mother, for example, a flexible coffee break schedule. For non-working mothers, use a baby sitter, friend, relative – go for a walk, shop, window shop, etc. – anything to get away from the usual environment at times. It is difficult to turn the nurturing inward toward oneself, but it is vital.
3. Physical exercise is important – helps overcome depression and anger.
4. It is difficult to ask for help, but if someone says, “What can I do?” give that person something to do – whether to shop, baby sit, clean house, write notes, etc. It will be good for you and for that person.

Continued on Page 10

THE GRIEF OF FATHERS

By: William Schatz

“Why does it seem so difficult for a man to express his emotions?”

“Why do men have difficulty crying?”

“Why doesn’t my husband grieve the way I do?”

“Why doesn’t Dad feel the way Mom and I do about the death of my brother?” These questions are frequently asked after the death of a child.

Although each person is unique, there are some generic tendencies in the way men handle their grief. This is due to their social conditioning process through adolescence and into adulthood.

This conditioning of the American male – a recent topic in the literature of psychology and sociology – has been a powerful negative influence on the ability of men to express their grief openly.

An examination of this process offers clarification of the differences in the approach to grieving by men and women.

Not every father experiences identical reactions, but, the thoughts expressed here have been confirmed by the testimonies of many bereaved fathers.

While growing up, the American male assumes certain roles modeled by his parents, teachers, relatives and friends.

These roles, while necessary or useful in modern society, later can prohibit a healthy grief process.

Let’s identify and examine some of the roles to determine their impact on the grief process for men.

One role is that of MACHO-MAN, a role which begins during boyhood (Big boys don’t cry.) and is reinforced by the media and females indoctrinated with the same conditioning.

On an unconscious level, men usually accept the macho role.

After the death of a child, fathers as well as mothers have a desperate need to express the emotions of grief.

Feelings of sadness are triggered by the



The demands of his job force a father to grieve at a different rate than his wife.

obvious absence of the child, family events, memories, pictures, and holidays.

Society will accept a father’s crying at the time of his child’s death or at the memorial service or funeral, but not long afterwards.

Because a man is less able to verbalize his pain, he and his wife may have difficulties as they attempt to support and understand each other.

Unless they can understand and discuss their different grief responses, they may have additional problems in an already distressed marriage.

When dealing with the death of a child, a father can feel a sense of failure in his role as PROTECTOR. (Men assume quite naturally the role of protector of wives, children, and property.)

He begins to ask himself why he didn’t do something that would have prevented the death.

He fails again in this role because he cannot protect his family from the pain of grief or shield them from the devastating effects of his own grief.

The role of PROVIDER commonly causes a father to return to work very soon after

his child’s death.

He may have problems at work or he may reinvest himself in his job, attempting to forget his loss.

Because at home he cannot avoid facing the death of his child, he tries to find activities which will prevent his being at home too much.

The demand of his job force a father to grieve at a different rate than his wife. Divorce and alcoholism often follow the death of a child.

As a boy grows up, his parents encourage him to “stand on your own two feet,” so he assumes the role of the SELF-SUFFICIENT MAN.

When coping with the death of his own child, he may feel he should be able to handle it alone.

Men tend to share about what they do, rather than what they feel. The need to maintain a self-sufficient posture often keeps fathers away from meetings, peer sharing, and professional help.

Understanding the male conditioning and the impact it has on the grief process is very important for both spouses.

Continued on Page 10



Sibling Grief:

We Can Help The Surviving Children

Dennis Klass has his Ph.D. in Theology from the University of Chicago and is a licensed Psychologist. He is a professor at the Webster University in St. Louis, MO. Dr. Klass is also advisor to the St. Louis Chapter.

We would like to protect our children from the hard parts of life, but we can't. When death comes to our house, the surviving children are affected too, and we do well to think about how our kids respond and about how we can help them, and about how we can let them help us.

I

Before we talk about the special ways kids have in confronting death, there are some points we can remember as we relate to them.

1. Kids have to be allowed to respond to the death in their own way..

The loss they have experienced is different to them than the loss we have known.

We have lost a child – the hope of our future, the part of ourselves, which will carry on after us.

They have lost a brother or sister with whom they had a very different relationship.

An older brother could be the one who picked on them a lot, who seemed to get all the privileges, who protected them from other kids at school, who covered for them to mom and dad, or who tattled on them when they goofed off.

A younger brother or sister might be the one they had to stay and watch when they would rather be with their friends, who was the little brat that was always knocking them down when they wanted to be grown up, who they had to share things with when they didn't want to, who they could feel superior to and boss around, who they could feel good about when they taught them a new place to go.

That is a different loss than parents have experienced. So kids will respond to their loss, not to ours.

Beyond that, children are individuals who

have, rather early, developed their own special ways of dealing with problematic reality.

So they may not show their grief in ways we would like them to, or they may take different paths through their grief than we might if we were in their shoes.



As individuals, their grief may be on a different schedule than ours so they may have different rhythms to their grief or spend a shorter or longer time in acute grief than we do.

They may come up with different answers to the meaning of death, different religious answers, than we do.

We have to respect their individuality as well as respect and maintain the bond between us and them. We do our kids no favor when we want or expect them (whether we say it or not) to respond in ways that we would like.

When we are down and the child is acting as if nothing is wrong, we do not help that child by making them feel guilty for not feeling at that moment as we do.

If we need to talk, but the child does not seem interested, or cannot manage it at that time, we need to find ways of allowing them to be themselves at the same time we remain true to ourselves.

2. In our grieving, we should not exclude the child.

When we are hurting badly, we often want to withdraw into ourselves, yet if the kids are little, they make demands on us. We are deep in crying and overwhelmed by the basic evil of a sense of the universe and the child wants a glass of water or the car keys.

So our response to the child is likely to be inappropriate to them. We seem to be angry without reason or we seem not to be there when they need us and so they feel estranged from us.

We can share our grieving with the child and let the child know that it is our grief and not them that is making us act this way. Children can understand if we let them, but, especially when they are under ten, we cannot expect them to read our behavior as adults can.

If we share how we are feeling and thinking, we give the child a great gift, for we have shown the child the depth of grief and also some possible ways grief can be resolved.

II

Researchers have given us some concepts which can help us understand how children grieve.

We need to note, however, that there are no absolute ideas or molds into which kids fall, just because they are one age or another,

I want to talk about two areas: Children understandings of death and their emotional response to death.

1. **Children's understanding of death.**

There is no age after about two years at which children do not understand what death is if they are given adequate explanation.

But very young children are likely to be confused if we talk to them in a distorted language.

If cars have "dead" batteries and fans yell "kill the umpire" at the ball game, but a person has "passed" or was "lost" we should not be surprised if kids don't know what we are talking about.

Children up to about age seven may not seem to take death too seriously because they don't understand that it is a real change or that it is not reversible.

Continued on Page 9

Sibling Grief

Helping Surviving Children

Continued from page 8

So the dead are in heaven or under ground, but they eat, sleep, and play there just like they would have done when they are alive.

A friend of mine was helping plan a birthday party for a four-year-old a few weeks after the child's mother had died. The girl said matter-of-factly, "my mother can't come, because she is dead."

These children may not distinguish between deaths as adults do. One child comforted his grandfather after the death of his grandmother by saying the duck in his pre-school died, so he understood just how grandpa felt. Children over seven years, however, share our adult conceptions about death and should be able to understand any explanation we give.

2. Children's emotional response to death.

For children under seven years (please understand I only use these ages as rough estimates – kids develop faster and slower) the problem death presents is separation and the fear of separation, especially from the mother or primary care giver. This fear of separation, especially after the death of a sibling, may be expressed by clinging close, or perhaps a regression of behavior appropriate to much younger ages when the mother was more immediately involved with their physical activities like eating, toileting, or dressing. It can also express itself as a withdrawal and a determination not to need the parents.

At this age children have a real feeling of power in the world.

The sun rises so they can have a day and goes down so they can have night.

Words can also have a magic power, so to call someone a name, or to damn them, or to wish them dead has the same force as reality.

If therefore, a child has wished them dead (as most of us have to our siblings at some point) and then they die, the child may very well feel as if he/she caused the death.

From about seven to twelve (again take the ages with a grain of salt) the problem with death is aggression.

Death is personified as something that comes to get you. Our culture has a lot of such

personifications: Darth Vader, the grim reaper, the bogey man.

Death may very well be connected with the aggressive forces the child of this age is attempting to control with him/herself as society acceptable ways.

There has been some scholarly writing about prolonged psychological problems in children when they have not adequately resolved their grief.

If death came and got my brother or sister, it could very well be coming to get me.

Those who have read Tom Sawyer know that the best way to ward off such strong aggressive death is to utter magic incantations, or to do ritual things like putting special objects in special places.

We will sometimes find children acting in ways to ward off the reaper.

Children over about twelve or thirteen respond to death much the same as adults.

The problem death presents especially strong to some adolescents (though I see it strongly too in parents who have lost children) is philosophical or religious. The fact that death makes them ask serious questions about the justice of God, or about the ultimate meaning of life.

One of the answers to those questions which can get support in adolescent music and literature is a kind of nihilism, a belief that there is no meaning in life so the individual might as well enjoy whatever fleeting pleasure the moment can offer.

For other teenagers, the encounter with death can lead to some important and life-long religious and political commitments.

Very often adolescents have difficulty expressing emotions connected with death.

This may be because they find the en-

counter with death so frightening that they simply turn off the experience itself and so really don't feel it.

It may also be that they are at an age when many strong and new feelings are inside them and they have trouble sorting them out and the calm exterior can be a cover for some pretty hard turmoil inside.

There has been some scholarly writing about prolonged psychological problems in children when they have not adequately resolved their grief.

It is important to remember when we hear such things, that most children are basically healthy and if given information and communication, can comprehend well.

However, if we see major changes in the child's behavior within 18 months after a significant death, it is possible that there are some serious death related problems at work.

Changes which can be important can be in sleep habits, eating, the group the child goes around with, dropping grades, and talk of suicide.

Such problems are usually not the child's alone, and it is a good idea for the whole family to see a professional helper like a psychologist, trained clergyperson, or counselor.

But we should not assume that grief is a major problem for many kids. It is the same problem for them it is for us.

We recognize the child in us in the way our children face death.

If we give them the freedom to respond in their own way to the death of a sibling, and if we will share our grief with our surviving children, we can help them and have them help us.



How Many Children Do You Have?

By: Mary Cleckly

Shortly after my son died, I realized that this question was going to be bothersome.

Each time someone asked me about the number of children, I struggled with the answer. I soon decided I was not going to let this become a problem. I thought about how I felt about my choices of answer and chose the one that met my needs in the beginning.

I had a surviving daughter, but I knew for me to say "one" would seem a denial on my part that my son had lived, and that wasn't right for me.

In the beginning, when I still needed to tell people that my son had died, I would tell in detail about his accident when the question about how many children came my way. As the months passed and I had told the story enough times, I found that it wasn't necessary to go into detail anymore. My needs had changed, and I rethought my answer.

Now, when I am asked how many children I have, I answer, "I had *two* children."

The criteria I used in determining if I go any further is whether the person asking is going to be continuing part of my life.

If so, they need to know about my son, and I tell them. Otherwise, we will be constantly dancing around that fact. Better, I think, to have it out in the open. It then loses its ability to interfere with the relationship.

If, on the other hand, the person asking is simply passing through my life, then I feel no need to go any further than, "I had two children."

Seldom does anyone catch the *had* instead of *have*, and pursue it.

If they do, or if they ask follow up questions about ages or professions, I tell them first that my 26 year-old son was killed in an accident.

Then I tell them about my daughter who is alive and doing well.

This gives them a choice. They can either acknowledge my son's death and ask

questions, or they can ignore that and ask about my daughter.

I am comfortable either way. If they are embarrassed, I see that as their problem. Just to show you how different we all are, however, my husband feels comfortable answering, "We have one child." That is what is right for him and that is what he should say.

You decide what is right for you – then say it. That way you defuse that powerful question and it loses its ability to traumatize. Don't let it be a problem.



The Grief Of Fathers

Continued from Page 7

But just as important is the need to convince men to accept their true feelings as normal, bypass role expectations, and give themselves permission to grieve.

SUGGESTIONS:

1. Give yourself permission to grieve.
2. Do some daily exercises.
3. Talk to other bereaved fathers.
4. Ask for a "Fathers Only" night at your chapter.
5. Learn to cry again.
6. Talk to your family, explaining that you don't always grieve the way they do.
7. Take time for yourself.
8. Direct your anger at things, not people
9. Don't hesitate to seek professional help.

I Slept Like A Baby

For the first month after my daughter died, I slept like a baby – I really did!

Slept a couple of hours, woke up crying.

Slept a couple of hours, woke up crying

Slept a couple of hours.....

By: Tom Crouthamel
St. Louis, MO

The Bereaved Marriage

Continued from page 6

Husband-wife relationships:

Until a death occurs, behavior patterns within a family are predictable; afterwards, they are different; the old ones are gone.

1. Don't try too much too fast.
 - a. Drop expectations; be patient with each other.
 - b. Respect each other's agenda – i.e., how each grieves, and the timetable, since no two grieve exactly the same way or at the same pace. If one does not show grief, it does not mean memories are forgotten, if a spouse does not show grief, he or she cannot be forced to do so when a wife cries and husband does not, it may make him feel he had not loved enough. This doesn't mean tears aren't good – they are.
 - c. Spend time together, possibly even schedule it. Each is a reminder of the loss; for this reason, they may even avoid one another.

How do you have fun?

1. Make an attempt, but preferable not the activity that was done as a family. This will have to wait.
2. Regarding sex – usually one is ready and the other not. There may be a feeling of guilt and conflict. A wife may fear that her husband will go outside the marriage. Sex is a sharing that is a reminder of the loss. Sex is a happy experience, yet often there is guilt for allowing oneself to feel good when your child had died.

Therefore resume slowly and with patience. It is important to be able to say, "I am angry about what happened to our child, but it does not mean I love you any less."

Bill and Barbara Schatz



TO BEREAVED GRANDPARENTS

By: Margaret Gerner, MSW, CGC

As grandparents we have lost a precious child too. While our grief is different from that of the parents, it is nonetheless real. It is deep and painful, and, just as the grief of parents must be faced and worked through, so must ours. Furthermore, in addition to the loss of our grandchild, our grief is complicated by the fact that we see our own child in such misery.

As bereaved grandparents we face two tasks, working through our own grief, and helping our bereaved children.

Let us discuss them separately, but you will find that usually while working at one task you will be working at the other at the same time.

Our first task is to work through our grief. To do that we must do much the same as it is suggested to bereaved parents. We must learn about the grief process, get a support system, and know that what we are experiencing is normal.

There are many excellent books and articles written about the grief process. Much of this can be gotten through Bereaved Parents USA or the library. In this material you will find information that will help you not only understand what you are experiencing, but will help you to understand what your grieving child is experiencing also.

A support system is essential. All bereaved grandparents are welcome at BPUSA meetings. If this is not possible for you, find someone who will allow you to express your emotions and allow you to talk and talk and talk about your grandchild and the pain you are feeling. Find some-one who will do this in a caring and nonjudgmental way.

The final necessary element for successfully working through your grief is to keep telling yourself that you are normal and not wallowing in self pity. You have loved your grandchild and now that he or she is dead, you hurt. It would be abnormal if you did NOT hurt, and openly expressing that hurt helps ease it.

The second task that faces us is that of helping

our grieving child. First of all, know that while there are helpful things you can do for our child, we cannot “kiss it and make it better” as we could when they were small children. Know that their grief will be long and hard, but that they must do it for themselves. The most important suggestion is to allow them to grieve in their own way and in their own time. Do not tell them what they should or should not do or feel. Allow them to talk about their child and how they feel. Be there for them in the way THEY need you to be. Be patient with them. Know that parental grief takes well over two years to be resolved and does

not progress on a steadily upward path. It is a succession of bad and not so bad days.

Provide physical help for them. Take the surviving children for a couple of hours or a day so that they can have some time alone. Do the laundry or grocery shop-

ping or fix meals for them. Grief drains the bereaved parent physically as well as emotionally. Doing what may seem like mundane chores is not only helpful for our grieving children, but it makes us feel that we are doing something tangible for them, and alleviates some of our own feelings of helplessness and frustration. There are numerous things we can do for our grieving children that will be helpful for them and at the same time help us to feel we are not totally powerless. We just need to think about it a little – and certainly we can ask them how we can help.

Grandparental grief is difficult, but it can be gotten through. Also it can provide us with the opportunity to be there for our child in a way that we could never before in our relationship with him or her. Don't lose this rare opportunity to cement a deep and lasting bond between you and your child that can result from this terrible tragedy. ●



MAKING IT THROUGH THE FIRST YEAR

Continued from Page 5

Don't take what people say to you too seriously. You will hear all kinds of platitudes: “Hold your chin up,” “Well, at least you can have other children,” “Be grateful that you have each other,” “I know just how you feel; I lost my 96 year old great-aunt last year.”

Sometimes it will hurt, sometimes it will make you angry. Try to cultivate a sense of humor.

Most people mean well, they're not out to hurt you. They just don't know what to say.

Our daughter, Shannon, when asked what she would say to a person whose child had died, replied: “I would say, “I love you.”” If we all took lessons from six year olds, we might know what to say. ●

*Excerpted from
Birmingham, AL Chapter*

Yesterday is experience –

Tomorrow is hope –

Today is getting from one to the other

As best we can



For The Sake of Newly Bereaved Parents

By: Mary Ehmann

For the sake of the more newly bereaved parents, there are points that bear repeating from time to time.

In the following we have used some of the material incorporated in a recent newsletter from the Birmingham chapter to whom we are indebted.

Most bereaved parents experience one or more of the following:

- Feel physically exhausted.
- Have difficulty sleeping.
Do not want to go to sleep nor get up.
- Feel tightness in the throat, heaviness in the chest, or lump in the stomach that turns over like a rock.
- Have an empty feeling with appetite loss.
- Wander aimlessly, forget 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.
- Experience feelings of anxiety.
- Think they are losing their mind.
- Feel the need to take care of others who seem uncomfortable around them, by politely not talking about their pain.
- Feel they don't want to go on.
- Say to oneself: "If only I had...."
- Keep asking, "Why?"
- Feel that 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
- Feel a mood change unexpectedly.
- Cry at unexpected times.

- Feeling able to cope and then falling back again – a see-saw type of reaction.
- Feeling 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 stages.



GRIEF AND DRUGS

By: Margaret Gerner, MSW, CGC

Some bereaved parents take mind or mood altering drugs to assuage the pain of their grief.

While we are not medical people and certainly can't tell you NOT to take these drugs, we feel we should share our experiences and warn you of the negative consequences that can result.

Our society treats grief as pathological; as being a disease. It is not. It is the normal reaction to a deep loss.

Some of these normal reactions are the inability to concentrate, over sensitivity, stunned feelings, problems with functioning and emotional outbursts.

The intensity of these reactions in bereaved parents, coupled with society's inability to cope with this intensity causes it to label a parent's reactions as "sick."

Thus, our friends and relatives frequently suggest we get some "medicine" from our doctor to treat what they believed is abnormal behavior.

Be careful in following their suggestion.

Drugs didn't help any of us in our grief. On the contrary, in most cases drugs harmed us by interfering with the body and mind's healthy way of coping with the terrible reality of our loss.

For us, mind-altering drugs only prolonged the normal reactions of our grief. Also, they suppressed the healthy emotions of sadness, anger and guilt. This caused us to bury these emotions which later surfaced in destructive ways.

Frequent crying bouts, sudden flare-ups of anger and self-blame are normal reactions to the death of a child, and must be expressed. This is the only way to relieve the tension these reactions create and to work through your grief.

All the seemingly bizarre reactions are normal coping mechanisms and will lessen with time – without the aide of drugs.

We tried to side step the anguish and pain by taking drugs. We could not.

Drugs delay and suppress our grief. They

complicated the already tremendous task of grieving.

Only by facing the devastating reality of our child's death and by repeatedly talking about our feelings with someone who will listen with empathy, and by allowing ourselves to give vent to our emotions did we get relief.

We know that grief is terribly painful, but if healthy reorganization of our lives is to take place we must face our grief and work through it with a clear mind.

Remember!! Alcohol is a mind-altering drug too.



After Death Communication

Nearly half of the grieving population report having a sensory experience that involves their child.

Bill and Judy Guggenheim of Orlando, Florida, are studying this phenomena.

They call the experience After-Death Communications (ADC). The following are just a few of the ADC experiences bereaved families reported having:

Sensing the Child's Presence. This is a distinct feeling that the deceased child is nearby, even though he can't be seen or heard.

Hearing A Voice. Some parents hear an external voice, just as if the child is talking to them.

Feeling A Touch. Parents may feel that the child is touching them, or they may feel a tap, a pat, a caress, a kiss, or even a hug.

Smelling an Aroma. The grieving parent or sibling may smell the child's favorite after-shave or perfume, or an odor associated with him.

Visual Experiences. A wide range of visual experiences are had. Appearances range from "a transparent mist" to absolute solid, with many gradations in between.

Twilight Experiences. These occur in the "alpha state" while falling asleep, waking up, meditating, or

praying.

Symbolic ADC's. Common symbolic signs involve rainbows, butterflies, birds and animals, flowers and other animate and inanimate objects.

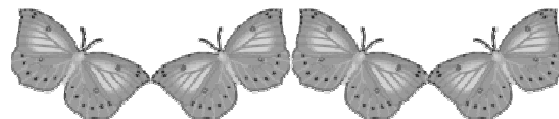
According to the Guggenheims these visits by deceased children are to offer comfort, reassurance and hope to their moms, dads, and other family members.

There doesn't appear to be a reason why some parents have ADC's and others don't, but fear, prolonged heavy grief, and anger seem to inhibit the possibility of having ADC's.

Bill and Judy have pulled their study together into a book.

If you want more information about ADC's, or want to purchase the book write to:

Bill and Judy Guggenheim
P. O. Box 916070
Longwood, FL 32791
www.after-death.com



Books For Bereaved Parents

The Bereaved Parent,
Harriet Sarnoff Schiff

When Your Child Dies:
Finding the Meaning in Mourning,
Nancy Stevenson and
Cary Traffon

Help For Bereaved Parents,
Mildred Tengbom

Recovering From The Loss Of A Child,
Katherine Fair
Donnelly

No Time For Goodbyes,
Janice Harris Lord

When A Baby Dies,
Martha Jo Church,
Helen Chazin,
And Faith Ewald

When Hello Means Goodbye,
Pat Schwiebert and
Paul Kirk

After Suicide,
John H. Hewitt

Don't Take My Grief Away From Me,
Doug Manning

Living When A Loved One Dies,
Earl Grollman

Sibling Grief
Marcia G. Scherago



The above listed books can be purchased from the Centering Corporation, since they carry many other good books, you may want to ask for their catalog.

Their Address is:

Centering Corporation
1531 N. Saddle Creek Rd.
Omaha, NE 68104
Phone: (402) 553-1200
Fax: (402) 553-0507

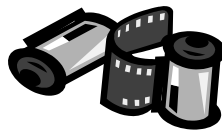
www.centering.org

Write A Letter To Your Child And Include:

What I wish I said to you.
What I wish I hadn't said to you.
What I wish I had done.
What I wish I had not done.
What I wish you would have done.
What I wish you had not done.
What I wish I could ask you.
What I would like to tell you.

Pour out your feelings to your child. Tell him/her of your anger, your guilt's. Tell your child how you love him/her. Tell your child *Goodbye.*

Tips for Preserving Photos



By: *Jim Staniforth*
Madison, WI

*From We Need Not Walk Alone,
Magazine of National TCF, Holiday Issue
1998*

Photographs represent memories. For bereaved parents pictures may well be among the most meaningful of remembrances we have of our children. When the holidays arrive, many of us pull out the pictures so friends and relatives can join us in celebrating the lives of our children and siblings.

But will your pictures look the same in another 10 or 20 years? With care they can.

Here are a few basic things you can do to help protect and preserve your photos.

Photo Albums – Replace old albums with ones that specifically state they are acid-free or archival quality. Avoid “magnetic” photo pages. The wax which holds the pictures in place will eventually dry out and make it virtually impossible to remove a picture without destroying it in the process.

Storage – Avoid storing photos in attics or basements. Temperature, humidity and light are the major causes of photo deterioration. Pick a storage location in your home usually an interior room or closet on the main floor that avoids extremes of temperature and humidity and provides low light conditions. Avoid storing or using chemicals (paint, sprays, moth balls) in the same storage area.

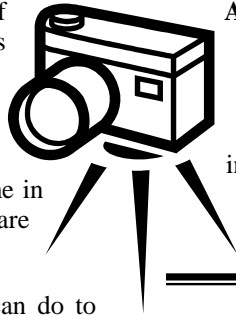
Duplicate – Important pictures (especially Polaroid’s which fade with time), slides and negatives should be duplicated by a quality film processing service. Store a set in a safety deposit box at the bank. Consider this also for irreplaceable videotapes.

Identification – Each photograph should have the people, event, date, and location on the back. Place the photo face down on a glass surface and write the information on the back using a #2 lead pencil. Do not press hard or you may leave an indentation. Sort photos by the date the picture was taken.

Avoid – using any of the following items, which can damage your pictures: Paper clips, masking tape, rubber cement, Elmer’s

glue, PVC plastic, string, cellophane tape, ballpoint pens, metal staples.

Inspect – Periodically check all your photos for any signs of deterioration. If you see any deterioration, check with a photographic professional if you are unable to determine the cause and solution. Take steps to correct the situation.



Acquire – an archival catalog. Check the Internet or your local camera store. Purchase those items you may need. Usually these catalogs provide a wealth of information regarding photo preservation and the products needed to accomplish the task.



Missing You

I just can't believe it...
The sun still rises and sets,
The moon and stars still shine,
The birds still sing,
I expected a change
In everything.
I just can't believe it...
It still gets dark and light,
The ocean still has waves.
The rain still rains.
The wind still blows.
Is it because
They do not know?
I just can't believe it...
I thought the world would stop
When in my house I found
An empty chair,
A missing smile.
I thought it would stop
For just awhile.
I just can't believe it ...

By: *Gretta Viney – Yakima, WA*

Bereaved Parents Of The USA *Our Credo*

We are the parents whose children have died. We are the grandparents who have buried grandchildren. We are the siblings whose brothers and sisters no longer walk with us through life. We come together as Bereaved Parents of the USA to provide a haven where all bereaved families can meet and share our long and arduous grief journeys.

We attend monthly gatherings whenever we can and for as long as we believe necessary. We share our tears, confusion, anger, guilt, frustrations, emptiness and feelings of hopelessness so that hope can be found anew. As we accept, support, comfort and encourage each other, we demonstrate to each other that survival is possible. Together we celebrate the lives of our children, share the joys and triumphs as well as the love that will never fade.

Together we learn how little it matters where we live, our color, our affluence, or what faith we uphold as we confront the tragedies of our children’s deaths. Together, strengthened by the bonds we forge at our gatherings, we offer what we have learned to each other and to every more recently bereaved family.

We are the Bereaved Parents of the USA. We welcome you.

Grief: Our Act Of Love

By: Elaine Crier, Philip's Mom
Atlanta Chapter

"I had a child who died." How simple these words are, yet how painful they are to say. The death of a child is the harshest blow life has to offer; it destroys our trust in the world at the most basic level. Grief is our total response to the death of a child; our body, mind, emotions and spirit all react to the loss. While many of us wish to stop the intense grief work we are doing, we find it impossible for many reasons.

First, grief is an act of love, not a lack of strength or faith. The more we loved our child, the greater will be our grief. The more integrated our lives were with the life of our child, the more we will miss his or her very presence. The intensity of our grief is often representative of the intensity of our love.

Second, grief is a necessary process that we must go through in order to maintain our wholeness and sanity. If we do not grieve, we will not heal. One of the earliest and hardest lessons we bereaved parents learn is that men and women grieve differently, women, in general grieve more openly than do men, and women on the whole, are more comfortable

verbally expressing their feelings of loss. While segments of our culture dictate that it is more "manly" not to cry, we know this is not true. In fact, it has recently been found that tears of sadness contain an enzyme which inhibits the concentration of gastric acids, therefore, crying during times of stress will actually decrease the incidence of gastric ulcers many of us develop as a result of our loss.

Grief work also helps us to complete unfinished business with our child and close the past relationship that we had. We will never "get over" the loss of our child, nor would we ever really want to. We are who we are partly because of our relationship to that child. Our lives will always be influenced by our son or daughter, but most of us will eventually learn to live a meaningful life, despite our tragedy. Our child will always be with us in spirit and in love and we often feel a need to hold on to tangible items, such as toys or clothes, to maintain that feeling of closeness. But, intense grief work allows us to let go of the relationship we had and create a new relationship with our child. Our remembrances, love and feelings of oneness with our child can

never be destroyed. I cannot see or touch my Philip, but I vividly remember him. I have completed earthly mothering, but I still have an intense mother-child relationship with my son.

Grief over the death of a child is the hardest work that most of us will ever do. While we all wish for the pain to stop, we need to remember that we grieve intensely because we loved intensely. It is unrealistic to expect the grief to ever totally go away, because the love we have for our child will never go away. Our grief is an act of love and is nothing for which we should be ashamed.



The Greatest Grief

By: Peggy Gibson
Nashville, TN

A sudden accident killed your child. That terrible phone call changed your life with no warning – you didn't get to say goodbye – this has to be the most terrible loss of all.

Your child died by suicide – you feel you should have been able to prevent it. Your guilt is devastating. How can you live with such an incomprehensible tragedy?

You only had one child – now you have none and your focus in life is gone. What's the point of living? What could be more devastating?

You've experienced the deaths of more than one of your children – will it happen again? How does one survive this pain again?

When your baby died, your dreams died – you have few memories and you're too young to be suffering like this – this loss is the most unfair.

Someone murdered your child – an unbeliev-

able violation – you're angry and your frustration with the legal system feeds your anger. This must be the very worst.

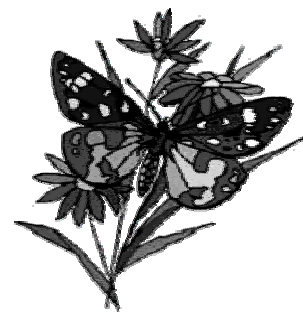
You're a single parent – your child had died and you have no one to lean on, no one to share your grief – surely your suffering is the most painful.

The unbelievable has happened – your adult child died – you had invested so much in that child – now who's going to care for you in your old age?

You had to watch your child suffer bravely through a long illness – you were helpless to ease his pain and to prevent his death – how do you erase those horrible images? – Yours must be the greatest grief.

The truth is that the death of any child is the greatest loss, regardless of the cause, regardless of the age. Our own experience is far more painful than we had ever previously envisioned, so how could we possibly comprehend what others have

undergone? To make comparisons between our own suffering and the pain of others is an exercise in futility. It accomplished nothing and sometimes can be hurtful to others. To say that one type of death produces a greater or deeper grief than another tends to place different values on the children who have died. Each child is worthy of 100% of our grief, each person's sorrow is 100%, and each loss is 100%, because we love each child, those still living and those who have died, with 100% of our being. I can't imagine wanting to walk in the shoes of any other bereaved parent, can you?



Death Of An Adult Child

By: Audrie Norris
UK National Newsletter,
Spring 1993

If I had a dollar for every person who has said to me since Nicolas died eight years ago, "Well, he wasn't really a child, was he?" I would be able to afford to retire. I think this is a common problem with people in general – I am talking now about the ones who haven't been along the same awful road as we members. They seem to think that a child ceases to be a child once he or she is past needing total parental care. Maybe society is at fault in that our offspring are encouraged to race through childhood at a great rate of speed. Sometimes it frightens me when I look at my ten-year-old granddaughter experimenting with early make-up, choosing fashionable clothes, and hardly playing with toys any more. Perhaps this is why people think of teenagers, and even young adults, as "not being children" any more. But the once crucial fact remains—however old they are, they are still someone's child. Parents somewhere are possibly grieving for the child they expected to bury them, not the other way around.

I have often been told that I was lucky to have Nick for 16 years, and I know that is true, but during those years we forged so many bonds, made so many plans and sailed on so many dreams that the parting was like the bursting a giant bubble.

Parents of an adult child who dies have all the same grief reactions as the parents of a younger child, but these can often be interlaced with a multitude of complications. Often there has already been a parting, with the young person moving away from home, either to college or perhaps to an apartment of their own. This parting is never easy for parents, but they cope because they can at least speak on the phone or see their child from time to time. They can also feel a sense of pride in having raised their child to independence. The parting that comes with the child's death leaves a feeling of total desolation, and often a sense of failure in not having raised the child to his full life potential. We see the plans for the future swallowed up and destroyed. All the hard work the child put into making his mark on the world suddenly counts for nothing. There is such a wide circle of people affected by the death of an adult child because he has had a chance to collect a much greater selection of friends. There are very frequently a few

broken hearts in this circle once the child dies. I had already anticipated a few broken hearts when my tall, handsome son made the decision to study for the Catholic priesthood, but I didn't expect to be trying to console the young ladies in the way that I had to, and certainly not so soon.

Some bereaved parents of an adult child have to watch as their widowed son-in-law or daughter-in-law eventually make a new life for themselves, sometimes involving grandchildren becoming part of a new family. This is not an easy situation to accept. We all know at heart that this is almost certainly what our beloved son or daughter would want for their spouse and children, but it hurts to hear the child call someone else "Mommy" or "Daddy," and for them to inherit a new set of grandparents. Sometimes there is an even harder cross to bear if the surviving son-in-law or daughter-in-law cuts off all contact with the bereaved parents, and they feel that another vital link with their child has been lost. Then there are the adult children who do not marry but devote their lives to looking after aging parents. The trauma when this sort of child dies first can leave so many problems. Parents of this age group are certainly not expected by society to grieve for long over "another adult." Also, they are suddenly expected to be able to cope alone with often very little support from outside.

Perhaps lastly we should look at the adult child who has not fit in with convention. These are the ones with alcohol or drug problems, the ones in our prisons; the youngsters who choose (or are forced) to live rough. These are still someone's child, and the loss for these parents is just as great.

I recently attended a seminar on grief, and I heard one or two of the delegates, all professional people, say, "I thought this was supposed to be about children." The point that had raised this comment was an excellent interview with a teenager about his coping with the death of his father. This was only a reversal of the situation we are often faced with. When will people learn that a child is always the child of his parents, whatever his age?



Let's Go Home

By: Sandy Fein
Manhasset, NY

Let's go home –
My eyes pleaded to my husband.
We don't belong here.
This is crazy – these people are still hurting. Two, five years later and they are still coming here.
Let's go home.
We don't belong here.
We won't, we can't be like that.
Perhaps –
If I don't speak,
If I don't tell them why we came –
It won't be true.
But wait... Why are they laughing?
How can they be laughing?
They all lost children, yet they are laughing at something, somehow.
And wait... Why am I nodding at what he's saying?
Why do I feel I must say something to that couple who is in this nightmare even less time than we are?
They all seem to know what I'm feeling – without my even saying it – just not flinching at my tears.
That steady, endless stream of tears that seems will never stop.
Perhaps –
One day I'll join their laughter?
Let's wait – Perhaps we shouldn't leave just yet.

