

# grandparent GRIEF SUPPORT

The loss of a grandchild may affect you differently than your child. You have spent many years as a parent, protecting your child from physical and emotional pain. Now your child may be experiencing both physical and emotional pain greater than he or she has ever felt before. This is a pain that you cannot make “go away.” Watching your child suffer may leave you feeling powerless and frustrated by your inability to help.

At the same time, you are grieving the loss of your grandchild and the dream of your special relationship with him or her. In your mind, you may have already imagined special family times together such as birthdays and holidays. Grieving will help you to adjust to the devastating loss that you have experienced.

When a child dies, often attention is focused on the child’s parents. Grandparents may feel forgotten. However, when grandparents grieve it can be doubly painful. Grieving the loss of your grandchild and watching your own child’s agony at the same time may leave you feeling completely unable to alleviate the anguish for either of you. It is very important to be able to relay the feelings that you are having. Share your thoughts and feelings with friends and family. Because of his or her own grief, your child may have a very difficult time acknowledging your feelings of loss.

## BELOW ARE FOUR EXPERIENCES OF GRIEF YOU MAY RECOGNIZE IN YOURSELF, YOUR CHILD OR OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS:

The following experiences are common aspects of grief. It’s important to know that the phases do not necessarily occur in order. Some people may go back and forth between these feelings, experience more than one at a time, or even skip one entirely. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

You may want to put your own grief aside to support and comfort your own son or daughter who is mourning. However, it’s important that you allow yourself to mourn and work through the phases of grief at your own pace. Your grief, and how you work through each phase, is unique to you.

### **Numbness or Protest**

You may have been overcome by a sense of numbness upon the loss of your grandchild or you may have protested your grandchild’s death; this reaction may have been characterized by mental and physical signs of stress.

### **Searching and Yearning**

You may find yourself completely preoccupied with your grandchild and seeking any and all reminders. During this time, you may treasure your grandchild’s mementos, photographs, a lock of hair, books, toys, blankets and/or clothing.

### **Disorganization and Despair**

During this time, you may begin to recognize the loss of your grandchild. You may feel helpless and begin to withdraw from others.

### **Reorganization**

At this time, your grief becomes more integrated into your daily life. You may find that your life has changed, and you have adopted new patterns of living.

# grandparent GRIEF SUPPORT CONTINUED

## WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD

You may be asking what you can do for your child. As a parent, your instincts may lead you to want to take charge, handle the situation, make decisions and protect your child from any more pain. However, it may be very important for your child to make decisions as a part of the mourning process. Some children may even become angry if you try to take control of the situation, regardless of your motives.

You play an extremely important role during this time in your child's life. Be present and let your child know you are available to support him or her in the way that is most helpful. You cannot do your child's grief work for him or her, but you can act as a guide for your child through the mourning process.

Try not to tell your child what they should or should not do or feel. Avoid statements such as "he/she is in a better place," or "God needed her more," or "you still have your other children," or any statements beginning with "at least." Although you may be trying to comfort your son or daughter, these types of statements won't alleviate their pain. In fact, they may actually be hurtful or alienate your grieving child.

You may find that the most important thing that you can do is just to be there and listen. Allow your son or daughter to mourn in his or her own way. Encourage dialog and open expressions of grief and remembrance. It may be helpful to partner with your child in creating rituals to honor your grandchild's life and memory. As a parent, you have guided your child throughout life. At this time, your role is just as important to be there for your child, providing your love, guidance, and support through this difficult time.