

The Physical Effects of Grief

- Sleep irregularities
- Changes in appetite
- Emptiness / Hollowness
- "Heartache"
- Restlessness
- Spontaneous crying
- Irritability
- Sighing
- Muscle aches and tension
- Lack of concentration
- Memory lapses
- Headaches
- Burning sensation in the stomach
- Tightness in the throat or chest
- Exhaustion
- "Brain fog"

The Emotional Effects of Grief

- Numbness
- Shock
- Denial
- Anger
- Guilt
- Depression
- Fear
- Frustration
- Loneliness
- Love
- Reconciliation

May love be what you remember the most!

Darcie Sims



Words

*When grief is new
you need not find a reason
however good and brave
to temper your despair.*

*When grief is new
the heart accepts no answer
however wise and kind
to ease your mourning.*

*When grief is new
your life can only know
disintegration,
overwhelming pain....*

*My friend, try to believe
what other grievers learned:
you will not always hurt
as you hurt now;
time will restore
the soundness of your mind.*

*(All other words are shadows on the wind
when grief is new.)*

Sascha Wagner

For support in your area contact:

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF CANADA



National Office

Toll-free: 1-866-823-0141

Website: www.tcfcanda.net

Email: NationalOffice@TCFCanda.net

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Mourning the Death of a Child



**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS
OF CANADA**

An international peer support
organization for bereaved parents and
their surviving children

When a Child Dies...

Our child has died, and our lives are forever changed. We live in the time frame of “before” and “after” and the grief journey is long and painful. If we are to heal, we cannot skirt the outside edges of our grief...we must journey through the twists and turns, through the raw core of our grief, before we are able to feel the gentle touch of healing.

Grief is a natural and normal reaction to loss. It is a physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological response. Grief is what you think and feel on the inside. Mourning is the outward expression of those thoughts and feelings. To mourn is to be an active participant in our grief journeys.

We all grieve when someone we love dies, but if we are to heal, we must also mourn. For while your grief journey will be an intensely personal, unique experience, mourners must yield to this set of basic human needs if they are to heal.

1. Acknowledging the loss

The first need of mourning involves gently confronting the reality that your child has died and will never physically be with you again. Whether the death was sudden or anticipated, acknowledging the reality may take weeks or even months. Replaying events surrounding the death is a vital part of mourning.

2. Accepting the pain of grief

It is easier to avoid, repress or deny the pain of grief than it is to confront it, yet it is in confronting our pain that we learn to reconcile ourselves to it.



3. Remembering the child who died

Allow yourself to pursue the precious memories and dreams reflecting the life of your child. Trying to be helpful, many will encourage you to take down photographs, put away mementos, clear out the child’s room, keep busy and even relocate. But remembering the past makes hoping for the future possible. Your future will become open to new experiences only to the extent that you embrace the past.

4. Developing a new self-identity

You have gone from being a "parent" to a "bereaved parent", or perhaps to a "childless family". Struggling with your changing identity as well as the diminished size of the family unit brings feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, frustration, and fear. Your "change" is remarkably noticeable to others —returning to the "old you" or "former self" is not an option. Over time, some parents discover that they develop a more confident, caring, kind and sensitive identity. Others do not — they become bitter, angry and can find no hope. However, the tendency is to develop the assertive part of our identity that empowers us to go on living even though we continue to feel a sense of loss.

5. Searching for meaning

When your child dies, you naturally question the meaning and philosophy of life— exploring religious and spiritual values and searching for a meaning with the "How?" and “Why?” questions. The death of your child reminds you of your lack of control. Part of you has died, and you are now faced with finding some meaning in going on with your life.

6. Receiving ongoing support from others

The quality and quantity of understanding support that you receive during your grief journey will have a major influence on your capacity to heal. You cannot—nor should you try to—do this alone. Drawing on experiences and encouragement of friends, peer support groups or professional counsellors is not a weakness but a healthy human need. And because mourning is a process that takes place over time, the support must be available months and even years after the death of a child.

Reconciling Your Grief

You may have heard that your grief journey will end when you resolve or recover from your grief. But your journey will never end. People do not “get over” grief.

Reconciliation occurs when you integrate the new reality of moving forward with life but without the physical presence of your child. With reconciliation comes a renewed sense of energy and confidence, an ability to fully acknowledge the reality of the death and a capacity to become re-involved in the activities of living.

In reconciliation, the sharp, ever-present pain of grief gives rise to a renewed sense of meaning and purpose. Your feelings of loss will not completely disappear, yet they will soften, and the intense pangs of grief will become less frequent. Hope for a continued life will emerge as you are able to make commitments to the future, realizing that your child who died will never be forgotten, yet knowing that your life can and will move forward.

Adapted from *The Journey Through Grief: The Six Needs of Mourning* by Dr. Alan Wolfelt Ph.D.
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