

Grandparent Grief

After the death of a child, many loved ones are grieving. Grandparents experience a unique grief over the loss of this special child. This flyer offers suggestions for grandparents and those who support them.

The death of a loved one is an experience that changes you forever. As a grandparent, you have a special kind of grief after losing a grandchild. It will take time for you to understand and accept these changes. Your grief is very real and you have every right to hurt. Grieve at your own pace and in your own way.

What can I expect as I grieve?

Grieving happens over time, and everyone grieves differently. There is no set amount of time for grieving, and the way you feel may change over time. You may feel shocked, sad or lonely. Anger, guilt and emptiness are other typical feelings you may experience.

Searching for meaning after a death is also common. The death of a child seems out of the natural order of life. You may not understand why it happened. You might question beliefs you have always held or your faith might become deeper.

How far away you lived from your grandchild can make a difference. If you lived far away from your grandchild, you might be mourning for the time you did not get to spend together. If your grandchild lived nearby, you may feel as if something is now missing and cannot be replaced. Some grandparents raise their grandchildren when their parents are unable to. If this was your situation, you may have many of the same feelings that you would if you were the child's parent.

Even as you grieve your grandchild's death, you may also have to care for your child, the parent, as they grieve the loss. You may feel powerless and wish you could take your child's pain away. This is sometimes called a "double grief," because you are grieving for your child and for the loss of your special grandchild. Supporting your son or daughter while sorting out your feelings of grief can be overwhelming.

How can I cope with these feelings?

It may comfort you to set aside a time of day to do something to remember your grandchild by. You might try lighting a candle during mealtime or taking a walk to a special place. If it is helpful to you, you may find support in your faith community or at a support group. Some people plant trees or flowers to remember their loved one by.

Holidays, anniversaries and birthdays can be especially hard days. It may help to plan ahead for these times. You may want to talk with the child's parent, your son or daughter, about what to plan for these days.

To Learn More

- Journey Program
206-987-2062
- www.seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.
- For Deaf and hard of hearing callers
206-987-2280 (TTY)

How can I take care of myself?

Remember to take care of yourself during this hard time. Give yourself permission to grieve. It can be helpful to talk with your family, friends, faith community or a counselor. Online support communities, such as the Compassionate Friends (www.compassionatefriends.org), might be helpful.

Sometimes you may want to take a break from your grief—volunteer for a cause you believe in, take a vacation, see a movie or get lost in a good book. You may find that some days are easier than others, or that when you thought you were feeling better, something sets you back. Realize that this is normal, and be gentle with yourself.

Books that may help:

Grandparents Cry Twice: Help for Bereaved Grandparents, by Mary Lou Reed, Baywood Publishing, 2000.

When a Grandchild Dies: What to Do, What to Say, How to Cope, by Nadine Galinsky, Gal in Sky Publishing, 2000.

Forgotten Tears: A Grandmother's Journey Through Grief, by Nina Bennett, Booklocker.com, 2005.

Understand Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart, by Alan Wolfelt, Companion Press, 2004.