



Healing as a Couple

As a couple, you have lost a child. Now, each of you is feeling your own pain. The pain of saying “good-bye” before your child has had a chance to grow up.

The death of a loved one is an experience that changes you forever. It will take time for you to understand and accept those changes. Healing as a couple can be very hard, especially when you have different ways to deal with your child's death. It is OK for you to cope in your own way and to take as long as you need. Here are some things to remember to help you support each other as you deal with grief.

What can we expect as we grieve together?

You will not always grieve at exactly the same time or in the same way. Often, while one of you grieves, the other will give support. Later the roles may reverse.

Sometimes, when one of you has a different way of grieving than the other, it can feel like the other person does not care as much or is not grieving. You may look for meaning in the loss in your own way. One of you may turn to faith, while the other may turn to something else. One might read books, while the other might find books to be useless. These opposite ways of coping can be hard for both of you. They can also help keep a balance for you and your family as you grieve. Remember, if your relationship was strong before your child's death, it can become a deeper relationship as you heal together.

How can we support each other as we grieve?

Each of you may have different ideas about what to do with your child's things. One of you might find it helpful to go into your child's room or to go through your child's things, while the other might want to avoid this. It is good to talk about the different ways that you are coping, and try to meet halfway when you are able to.

You each may have had different hopes and dreams for this special child. Letting go of these is often part of your sadness. Sharing your dreams with each other may help you to understand your partner's feelings better.

Many stressful things in life affect each partner at different times. When a child dies, grief affects you both at the same time. Your partner, who is usually your main support, cannot always respond because they are dealing with their own grief. Your partner does not have to be your only support—it is often a good idea to look to other people, too.

Grief can also affect your sexual relationship. Talk about your feelings openly. Remember that all kinds of touch, like hugging, holding and cuddling can be healing during this time.

You and your partner will sometimes need “private time” away from each other as you grieve. This is an important time for you to deal with private feelings and thoughts and to reflect. It is important to give each other this time and space when you need it.

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)

It is OK to start to enjoy life again after the death of your child. Your child would not want you to be sad the rest of your life. Laughing and crying with your partner helps each of you to heal.

Even the strongest relationships have hard times. It is important to talk to each other honestly about your needs and feelings.

What are some ways to cope with grief?

- Seek out support outside of your relationship, like support or self-help groups, professional counselors, or religious or spiritual support
- Spend time together as a couple
- Spend time alone when you need to
- Set a time to talk to each other every day. It can be hard to talk about how you are feeling, and making a plan to talk can help.
- Pray together, if it is helpful to both of you
- Give yourselves time to adjust to the loss, and be patient with each other
- You might want to do something in memory of your child, or start a new ritual together to remember your child. Some suggestions:
 - Plant a tree, a bush or flower garden
 - Burn a candle at special time, like at mealtime

How can we take care of our relationship as we grieve?

- Treat yourselves to a night out once in a while
- Take walks together
- Give each other back rubs
- Write love notes to each other
- Talk to each other about the feelings you have
- Be accepting and patient with each other

It is important to remember that even though you have lost a child, you still have each other. You can share many special memories together.

Adapted from Duke University Health System Bereavement Program "Healing Together—As a Couple" and Ann Kincaid, ACSW "Grief of Couples"