



Healing as a Single Parent

When a child dies, the result is a broken heart. You are feeling the pain of saying “good-bye” before your child has had a chance to grow up.

Losing your child is an experience that can change you forever—and as a single parent, you may face unique issues as you grieve this loss. It is OK for you to cope in your own way and to take as long as you need. Here are some suggestions that may help you to cope with your grief.

What can I expect as I grieve as a single parent?

Grieving the death of your child is a life-long process. The way you grieve may change over time. You may feel some of these or other feelings:

- Loneliness
- Emptiness
- Shock
- Anger
- Guilt
- Sadness
- Shame
- Despair
- Depression

These feelings may get more or less intense, or even go away as time goes on. It is common to feel alone or distant from people in your life as you grieve. Single parents are often less likely to have support from others. It may be hard to find someone who you can share your pain and feelings with about your child's death. Even when you have other people around you, grief can be a lonely process, because only you can feel your pain.

You may feel like you need to feel close to friends and family. When you are in pain, it is normal to want extra touch and closeness. Ask for a hug when you need one. You may think about joining a support group or seeking spiritual support.

It is normal to have big changes in your emotions when you grieve. Feelings that you have about the death of your child can be strong and sudden. Give yourself time to deal with these feelings as you experience them.

What are some ways to cope with grief as a single parent?

Remember that your pain and loss is real. It is as real as the pain of parents with partners. You have the right to hurt. Grieve at your own pace and be gentle with yourself. Here is a list of things that may help you cope:

- Talk with friends and family
- Seek out support or self-help groups, professional counselors, or religious or spiritual support

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)

- Pray if it is helpful to you
- Give yourself time to adjust to the loss, and be patient with yourself
- You might want to do something in memory of your child, or start a new ritual to remember your child. Some suggestions
 - Plant a tree, a bush or flower garden
 - Burn a candle at special time, like at mealtime

It may also be helpful to plan ahead of time for special days and anniversaries. For example, holidays, Mother's and Father's Day, your child's birthday and their death date can be very hard. It may be a good idea to decide ahead of time how you would like to spend those days and what will make them meaningful to you. You may decide to change to your traditions or to make up new ones. Sharing this with family and friends may help you through these painful days.

Acknowledge your inner strength. Kelly Osmont, co-author of *Parting is Not Goodbye*, writes about the inner strength of single parents. She describes the strength that you need to parent alone as an important asset—a strength that you might not know you had without being alone. "Your special strength, plus the coping skills you've gained as a single parent, are valuable. You were strong enough to handle alone your job as parent; that knowledge can give you the courage you need to survive the grieving alone. And reaching out for others' support sometimes takes the most courage of all."

Adapted from Duke University Health System, Bereavement
"Single Parent Grief – After the Loss of a Child"