

Grandparent Grief

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 may take time for you to understand and accept these changes. Your grief is 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?

Grief is an experience that happens over time, and everyone grieves differently. There is no time frame for grieving, and the way you feel changes over time. You may feel shocked, sad or lonely. Anger, guilt and emptiness are normal feelings you may have.

Searching for meaning after a death is also common. The death of a child is 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 like something is missing and cannot be replaced. Some grandparents raise their grandchildren. If this was your situation, you may have many of the same feelings that you would if you were the child's parent.

How can I cope with my feelings?

Schedule special time

It may comfort you to set aside a time of day to do something to remember your grandchild. Rituals like lighting a candle during mealtime or taking a walk to a special place can be helpful.

Share your feelings with other people

You may find support in your faith community or at a support group. 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.

Plant a memory

Some people plant trees or flowers to remember their loved one.

Plan for holidays

Holidays, anniversaries and birthdays can be especially hard days. It helps to plan for these times. You may want to talk with your family about what to do on these days.

To Learn More

- Journey Program
206-987-2062
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your 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.

Rest

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. Remember to take care of yourself during this hard time.

Give yourself permission to grieve

You may find that some days are easier than others are, or when you thought you were feeling better, something sets you back. Realize that this is normal and do not judge yourself for how you are grieving or not grieving.

How can I help my own child?

Even as you grieve your grandchild's death, you may also have to care for your child, the parent, as they grieve the loss. This is called a "double grief" because you are grieving for your child, and for the loss of your grandchild.

Supporting your own child while sorting out your feelings of grief can be overwhelming. You feel powerless and wish you could take your child's pain away. The following are suggestions that might comfort your child:

- Allow your adult child to cry and grieve the way they need to.
 - When you say, "I am here for you," then truly be there and accept what they ask of you.
 - Offer practical help, like grocery shopping, cooking dinner, or babysitting other grandchildren.
 - Avoid common phrases like, "They are in a better place," or "At least, you have other children," and "It's going to be okay."
 - Do not take expressions of anger or frustration personally. These are expressions of the pain of grief, and it is nothing against you.
 - Allow for space between you and your adult child. Sometimes, your expression of grief can feel unbearable to manage alongside their own grief.
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Are there 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 Feldman, CreateSpace, 2015.
 - *Forgotten Tears: A Grandmother's Journey through Grief*, by Nina Bennett, Booklocker.com, 2005.
 - *Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart*, by Alan Wolfelt, Companion Press, 2004.
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