

# Healing as a Couple

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The death of your child 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 difficult, especially when you have different ways of dealing 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 experience grief over time.

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## 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 look for meaning in the loss in your own way. For example, 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 are hard on relationships, but they can also help keep a balance for you and your family as you grieve.

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## How can we support each other as we grieve?

### Respect special things and spaces

- Each of you can 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 can.
- Compromising on some things can help give each other time to adjust to the loss.

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### Talk about your loss

- It is important to talk to each other honestly about your needs and feelings.
- You each may have had different hopes and dreams for your child. Sharing your dreams with each other may help you understand your partner's feelings better.
- Communicating and sharing will help you feel less alone while you grieve.
- 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.

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### To Learn More

- Journey Program  
206-987-2062
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [seattlechildrens.org](http://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.

### Talk to other people, too

- 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.
- Seek support outside of your relationship, like support or self-help groups, professional counselors, religious or spiritual support, or a trusting friend.

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### Intimacy

- 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.
- Give each other back rubs, take walks together, or write love notes to each other.
- Sometimes, physical touch and your physical presence shows support when you do not know what to say.

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### Schedule time together and time alone

- Schedule and spend time together as a couple.
- You and your partner will sometimes need “private time” away from each other as you grieve, too. 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.

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### Start a ritual

- You might want to do something in memory of your child or start a new ritual together to remember your child like planting a tree, bush, or flower garden or burning a candle at a special time, like at mealtime.
- Pray together, if it is helpful to both of you.

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### Enjoy life again

- It is OK to enjoy life again after the death of your child. You can experience joy and grief at the same time.
- Treat yourselves to a night out sometimes.
- Laughing and crying with your partner helps each of you to heal.
- Remember that even though you have lost a child, you still have each other. You can share many special memories together.

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Adapted from “Healing Together – As a Couple,” Duke University Health System Bereavement Program, and “Grief of Couples,” Ann Kincaid, ACSW.