



A Grandparent's Grief



Providing *comfort*
during the
greatest of *losses*

a Grandparent's Grief

As a grandparent, your grief is two-fold. You have just been through the devastating experience of losing a grandchild, and you are watching your child suffer the loss of a child and cannot do anything to take away the pain.

You are in shock and feeling profound sadness at the loss of your grandchild. At the same time, you are watching your child experience one of the most unimaginable situations in life, the death of one's own child. The helpless feeling of not being able to dry the tears and kiss away the hurt can consume you. The pain your child feels today cannot just be hugged away.

Although you may feel the need to take charge of your child's life at the time of a loss, most agree that the best role a grandparent can take is a supportive one. For example, making decisions for the parents, such as funeral arrangements or putting away the child's things, is often an important step in the healing process for the parents, and it is helpful for them to have a part in it. It is suggested that a grandparent guide decision-making instead of taking charge.

As a grandparent, you have an important role at this time. You will always have some influence over your children, no matter how old they become. But you still need to recognize your child's need to make it through this

*"We hurt twice.
We hurt for our children
because they are our
children. Plus, we hurt for
the grandchild we lost."*

- a grandmother

experience in his or her own way.

Your child may need some guidance about seeing and holding the baby. Some parents do so eagerly and may ask for this as their right as parents. Others may feel they cannot hold the baby, or feel unsure if they would like to. If they see you holding and looking at the baby, it may make it easier for them to take that step. Although many are comforted by these tender moments together, not every parent or grandparent desires this interaction. If you wish to hold and see the baby and have not been offered, please ask.

Phases of Grief

- 1. Shock:** The parents will be stunned one minute, and the next feel intense panic, distress, or anger. They may feel that the situation is unreal or not happening to them.
- 2. Searching and Yearning:** The parents will yearn for their angel baby and search for the cause of their loss. The placement of blame is present at this stage, whether it's on others or themselves. The parents may be angry at just about everyone: God, doctors, nurses, friends, and you. They may suffer from Empty Arms Syndrome which is the physical aching of the arms to hold their baby. This is completely normal. If your child is suffering from this, please contact us for a resource that will bring some physical relief.
- 3. Confusion and Disinterest:** The parents often talk about having a feeling of emptiness, lifelessness, and hopelessness. They have little to no interest in activities they once enjoyed. They may neglect their personal appearance and daily tasks. This is also normal but should not continue for months. You may need to encourage them by physically taking them on errands. If they refuse and it continues into a downward spiral, you may need to contact a professional such as their doctor or a counselor.
- 4. Periods of Feeling Normal Again:** The parents may begin to branch out again to friends and activities. They may have started to discover some peace and acceptance and begin to show a renewed interest in life.

*"You want to take
away the hurt and
take it on yourself,
which is impossible."*

- a grandfather



Things grandparents should not say:

Please think before making these kinds of comments. They may add additional guilt and pain to the parents. It may also lead to resentment and hurt your relationship. As their parent, your child needs your comfort the most.

- ♥ "We thought you got pregnant too soon."
- ♥ "Maybe you shouldn't have been working so hard."
- ♥ "I knew all that running while you were pregnant wasn't good for the baby."
- ♥ "I told you that you weren't eating right or taking care of yourself."

Things grandparents should say:

- ♥ Refer to the angel baby as your grandchild and consider including him/her in conversations and your count of grandchildren. This will ease the parents' fear of the child being forgotten or somehow being erased from the memories of the family.
- ♥ Use your grandchild's name.

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