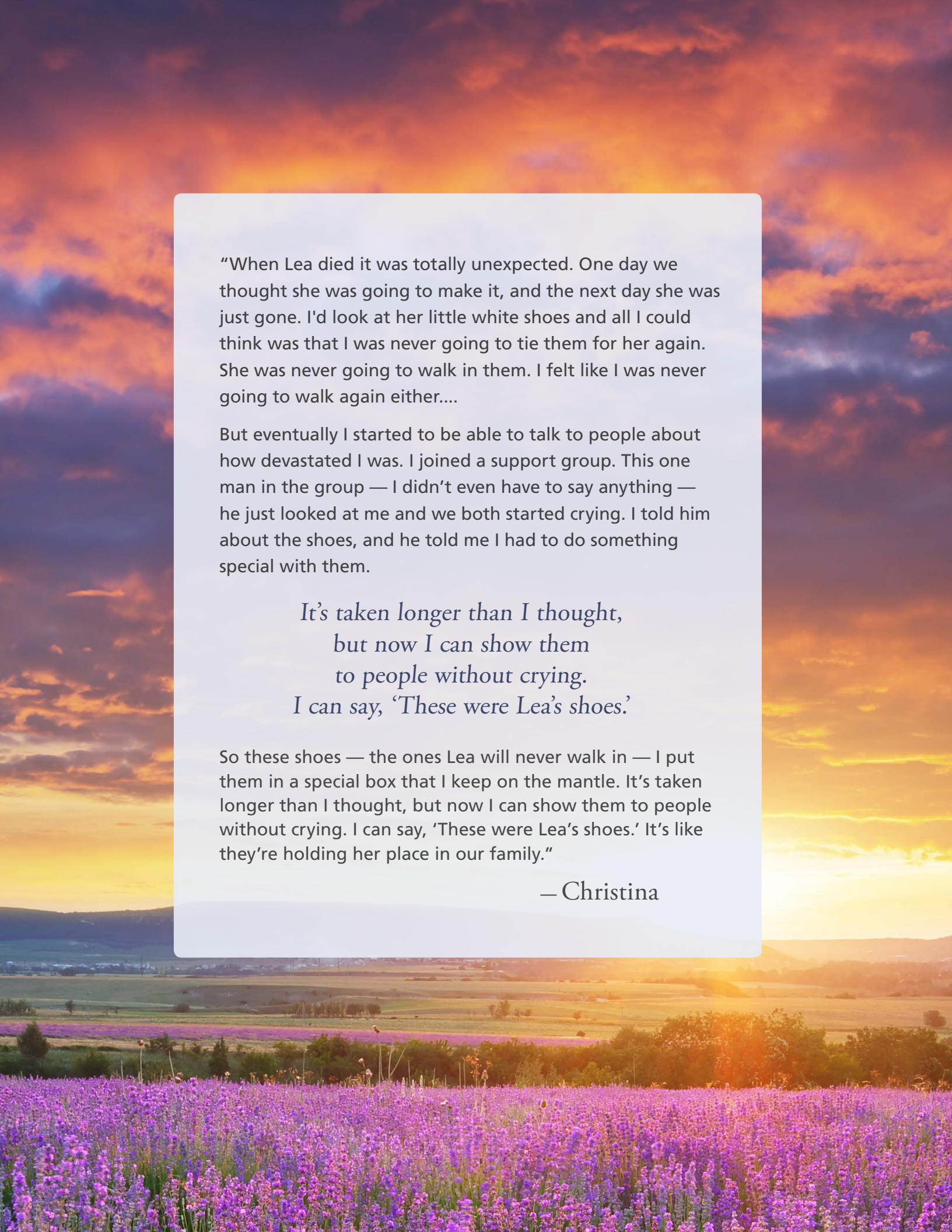


Saying Goodbye

Coping with the death of a child



"When Lea died it was totally unexpected. One day we thought she was going to make it, and the next day she was just gone. I'd look at her little white shoes and all I could think was that I was never going to tie them for her again. She was never going to walk in them. I felt like I was never going to walk again either....

But eventually I started to be able to talk to people about how devastated I was. I joined a support group. This one man in the group — I didn't even have to say anything — he just looked at me and we both started crying. I told him about the shoes, and he told me I had to do something special with them.

*It's taken longer than I thought,
but now I can show them
to people without crying.
I can say, 'These were Lea's shoes.'*

So these shoes — the ones Lea will never walk in — I put them in a special box that I keep on the mantle. It's taken longer than I thought, but now I can show them to people without crying. I can say, 'These were Lea's shoes.' It's like they're holding her place in our family."

— Christina

The pain felt with the death of a child is probably the most wrenching pain ever felt. You may feel that you'll never be okay again, or that the path ahead is unbearable. However, it is possible to move forward toward healing. Even though you'll always carry this experience with you, learning to live a full life again is possible.

We hope this booklet will help you find your way through this difficult time. You may not want to read all of this booklet right now. It may be more helpful a little later. For now, see the Survival Tips on page 5 for suggestions to help you get through the first few days.

What's Inside

- Getting through the first year4**
 - Survival Tips For You.....5
 - How Friends and Family Can Help.....5
- Understanding grief.....6**
 - What Is Grief?6
 - How Long Will This Sadness Last?7
 - What Can I Expect?.....8
- Experiencing grief.....9**
 - The Grieving Mind: Your Thoughts..... 10
 - The Grieving Body: Your Physical Symptoms 11
 - The Grieving Heart: Your Emotions..... 12
 - The Grieving Soul: Your Sense of Meaning..... 13
 - Grieving in Your Relationships..... 14
 - New Roles, New Friends: Building Your “New Normal” 16
- Managing grief and mourning17**
 - Day by Bay..... 18
 - Holidays and Special Days..... 19
 - Rituals and Remembrances..... 20
- Signs of progress21**
- There is hope.....22**
 - Reaching out..... 22

The First Year



“At his first birthday I was going to take my baby to Mexico to meet my grandmother. She was going to have a big party and my cousins were going to come.

We were going to stay a whole month. Now what do I do? I don't want to go by myself and have everyone be all depressed and sad around me. What do I do with that month? What do I do with the rest of my life?”

— Celeste

Whether a child dies suddenly, unexpectedly, or after a long illness, one thing is certain: there is no way to be prepared for a child's death. The physical presence, the parental role, and dreams for the future are now gone. After this loss, a new way to think about life presents itself.

How will you manage? The truth is, there is no one answer. Grief is every bit as unique as a child, and even though this is your unique experience, this booklet presents ways to learn from the experiences of other grieving parents and contains examples of how others have found their way forward. Grief is a process, not a fixed state. While the road ahead isn't the one hoped for, it is still on a road moving forward to a different place than the current one.

It's okay to feel numb

In the first days and weeks after your child has died, you may not feel like yourself. It may seem as if you don't feel anything at all. The numbness felt is your body's way of getting you through the initial pain. It's like anesthesia. Eventually the numbness subsides, but for now it's okay if you're not feeling the same as before. Even after you move beyond this numbness, it may return now and then, especially on holidays and birthdays.

Helpful Survival Tips

There are a few things to keep in mind during the first days after your child's death:

- **Take care of yourself.** The death of a loved one is stressful. While you may find it hard to care for yourself, it's important to eat well, drink plenty of water, and get enough rest. Physical activity can help, too. Ask others for help if completing the basic chores at home or work are a struggle.
- **Try to be patient with yourself.** It's common to feel that your emotions are out of control and that you are going crazy. It's normal to feel that way in times like this. As much as it's hard to believe now, this all-consuming grief won't last forever. Over time, you will find new ways to be yourself.
- **Feel what you feel.** If you feel numb right now, that's okay. If you're ready to cry, then let the painful feelings come. Don't try to hold them back. No matter how much it hurts, going through them is the only way to heal.
- **Let others help.** Many people want to help but won't know how and worry about upsetting or hurting you more. It's helpful for them to understand when the best time is to talk or when to be left alone. Let them help with errands. If able and feeling comfortable enough, tell them what you need. They will appreciate the guidance.

PRACTICAL CONCERNS

Right now there are a lot of details to take care of: the obituary, the funeral arrangements, the burial plans. Your social worker or care providers can give you information that will help you with decisions and arrangements.

How friends and family can help

As a friend or family member of someone who's grieving and interested in learning useful ways to help, please see the ideas below and on pages 14 and 15 of this booklet.

Listen. Really listen. Let those who are grieving tell and retell their story, without fear of criticism or judgement. Don't try to find magic words that attempt to minimize their pain. For example, don't say, "I know how you feel." Just be there and let them talk freely.

Help with responsibilities. If you're a close family member or friend, don't wait to be asked for help. Stop by and start helping. Make a list of what they normally do at home, from taking care of children, to fixing things, to paying bills. Try to help with as much as possible at first – and then be supportive as they strive to return to a normal routine.

Stay nearby. Continue to be available in the weeks, months, and years ahead. Remember, they may need you more in the future. It will take a long time to get through this, and they'll need your kindness and acceptance along the way.

Grief



“I’d be getting up and putting my clothes on and doing okay, like it was going to be a good day. And then it would come at me like a big wave. There was just this huge memory of her, and I wanted to be with her so much. It would take about fifteen minutes before I could be where I was again. Whenever it happened — and it still happens sometimes — I’d try to make myself think of her being happy. Wherever she is I try to picture her playing.”

— Lorraine

You may feel confused and disorganized—maybe even that you are going crazy. These are normal responses to the death of a child. Accepting the reality of where you are doesn’t happen overnight. It’s difficult to move forward when you want so desperately to return to the way things were. Learning more about grief is an important step in beginning to understand the broad range of normal reactions. Feeling more in control and being patient with yourself can bring hope to your day-to-day life.

What Is Grief?

The pain that comes with your loss can be consuming and confusing. It can be helpful to think of it in two ways: grief, or what happens to you, and mourning, or what you do with it.

Grief is what happens to you when you experience a terrible loss. It is the feelings of numbness and sadness and anger. Grief is the struggle of emotions trying to catch up to reality. This struggle is exhausting in every way—emotionally, physically, spiritually, and socially. However painful and difficult, grief is natural and necessary. Over time, grief changes and you move to a different place.

Mourning is the way grief is expressed. It’s crying, talking about it, writing about it, making scrapbooks, and visiting the grave. Mourning is hard work, too. There will be some days when nothing gets accomplished. Mourning is what helps you move steadily along the path. Will this path ever end? Yes. Moving forward, one small step at a time, leads to a more hopeful place.

How Long Will This Sadness Last?

Grief is permanent and this loss may never completely go away.

But, your grief moves to a place where you're able to live a normal life with a daily routine. No matter how long your grieving takes, it will probably feel as if it's endless. Try to remember these thoughts:

- Even as you progress, it won't always be in a predictable, linear way. Some days you'll move forward, some days back.
- Moving through grief faster or slower is not an indication of your own strength or weakness.
- The length of your grief is not a measure of how much you loved the person who died.

Myths about grieving

All of these statements are false:

- Most people experience grief in the same stages or steps.
- Not thinking about it makes you get over it faster.
- Your goal should be to get over it as soon as possible.
- Crying a lot is a sign of weakness.
- After grief is resolved, you'll never have to deal with it again.
- People don't grieve as much if it's an infant that dies.
- Adults and children grieve in the same way.
- Nobody can really help you.



AM I NORMAL?

You may be surprised by the way you feel. It may not make sense at all. If you're not feeling what you think you should feel, you may start to feel uneasy, or even guilty. These are some things you may be feeling—and are completely natural:

Shock and denial. "I feel like I'm on autopilot. This can't be true."

Anger. "Why him? Why us? Why now?"

Guilt. "Did I do enough? Did I do the right thing? If only I had. . ."

Relief. "At last this ordeal is over! I'm glad she's not suffering anymore. I'm glad it's over for my sake, too."

Anxiety. "I think I'm going crazy. Something else bad is going to happen to me."

Depression. "What's the use? How can I ever go on?"

Confusion. "I can't think anymore. I'm totally disorganized."

What Can I Expect?

Even though you're grieving in your own way, some experiences are very common. You'll likely find that:

- You'll have good days and bad days, good hours and bad hours. Sometimes it may feel as if you're going up and down on a roller coaster. Grief doesn't progress in a straight line.
- Your emotions may come on stronger and faster than they have in the past.
- Hurtful things may be said by those who won't know what to say. Others—even those you didn't expect—can be helpful and comforting.
- You'll experience grief differently from your spouse, from other people close to you, and from others who have lost loved ones.
- Healing doesn't happen overnight. The peace you desire may take longer than you expect. Stay hopeful that things will improve over time.
- You won't be the same as you were before. Tremendous loss causes a deep impact, but can change you in positive ways.

The next section gives more specific information on what you might experience.



Grief

“At first I thought I was going crazy. I was constantly afraid that someone else in my family was going to die, too. I was in a panic all the time. It still hurts, but now I can make some sense of what I went through. It’s like first everything had to come apart before I could start putting it back together.”

— Robin



Though nearly everyone experiences grief at some point, every person’s grief is unique. There’s no “right” way to do it. There’s no proper timeline. Nevertheless, there are experiences and feelings that are common among grieving parents.

The following pages discuss ways many people have grieved the death of a child. This information can help you see the ways that pain often shows up in a person’s life. You’ll see that it can affect your mind, body, heart, and soul—even your relationships. And hopefully, no matter how you feel right now, know you’re not alone in your experience.

*“All I could think was,
‘What if we had left on
time? What if I’d been
driving instead of Kim?
What if we’d taken the
other road? Maybe none of
this would have happened.’*

*I kept imagining us over
and over — like a tape
stuck in a loop — driving
there and getting
there okay.”*

— Margaret



The Grieving Mind — Your thoughts

You wish with all your heart that things could have turned out differently. It takes time for your mind to let go of that wish and accept what happened. And until it does, it's natural for your mind to try to rewrite what happened and create a different outcome. Coming to accept the reality of your child's death requires so much mental energy that you may feel like you're a different person altogether. Especially early on, you may feel:

- **Anxiety.** You may feel anxious, panicky, fearful, and worrisome. The security you once felt may be shaken.
- **Disbelief.** You may be unable or unwilling to accept the reality that a death has actually happened.
- **Guilt.** You may be consumed with thoughts of “If only I had” and “What if?”
- **Forgetful.** You may be distracted, forgetful, and unable to concentrate.
- **Annoyed.** You may be irritated with everyday conversations, and with other people's ability to return to everyday life.

What may help

Take care of yourself. Get as much rest as you can. Try to exercise and find ways to take time out from grief work now and then.

Feel what you feel. Pay attention to your thoughts, but try not to judge them. Don't feel like you have to hold back strong feelings.

Let others help. If you feel you can't move forward, reach out for support from others. Read about or ask how others how they made it through grief.

Seek calm. Meditation and relaxation can provide peace of mind and a feeling of calm.

The Grieving Body — Your Physical Symptoms

When your child died, you probably felt an intense lack of control — there's nothing more you can do to help him or her. It's natural for your body to tighten up at this point. Attempting to regain control takes more physical energy than most people imagine. Many people experience actual physical pain, symptoms of shock, or feelings of exhaustion. You may also experience:

- **Sleep problems.** You may have trouble sleeping, or sleep all the time to avoid the pain.
- **Low energy.** You may be so worn out that you feel like you just can't do anything.
- **Changes in appetite and weight.** You may want to eat all the time, which causes weight gain. Or, you may not want to eat at all, which causes weight loss.
- **Other symptoms.** You may experience one or more of the following:
 - Heaviness in your chest
 - Hyperventilating, or difficulty breathing
 - Dizziness
 - Sighing, feeling a “tightness” when you yawn

If any of these symptoms concern you, or don't improve over time, contact your doctor.

What May Help

Take care of yourself. Eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of water. Get enough sleep so your body can rest. Try to exercise, even if it's just a five-minute walk. It's okay to pamper yourself, as needed.

Be patient with yourself. Go slow, and lower your expectations of what you can do in a day. Your body is already working hard!



“When I went back to work after 2 months I could hardly get through the day. I couldn't stay awake. I couldn't focus. And I had a headache all the time. At lunchtime I'd race home and flop onto the couch. Then I'd go back for the afternoon and count the minutes. It took me a long time to be productive again.”

— Lois

“ I was her father and I was supposed to be her protector. And then she didn't make it. I felt like I'd failed her. I should have been able to find the right doctor, or pull the right strings. I was so mad at myself. She was a tiny baby. ”

— Spencer



The Grieving Heart— Your emotions

The sadness you feel can be one of the most difficult and consuming parts of grief. It's normal to feel a whole range of emotions, some of which are surprising. Here are a few of the emotional reactions reported by other grieving parents:

- **Sorrow.** Unexpected or uncontrollable crying is normal. Sorrow may increase for weeks or months.
- **Anger.** It's common to feel anger at yourself, others, God, even the person who died.
- **Guilt.** Guilt over something you did or didn't do, or something you feel is a common reaction. You think you could have done something to prevent this.
- **Relief.** You're relieved that at last the ordeal is over, especially if your child was suffering a long time.
- **Deep longing and loneliness.** Wanting to hold your child again is a deep longing. You can't imagine that anyone could understand how you are feeling.
- **Needing to talk.** Telling and retelling the story of your child's death feels right.
- **Unexpected reactions.** Laughing loudly and snapping back at others are unfamiliar ways for responding to friends and family.

What May Help

Take care of yourself. Get as much rest as you can. Try to exercise and find ways to take time out from grief work now and then.

Feel what you feel. Pay attention to your thoughts, but try not to judge them. Don't feel like you have to hold back strong feelings.

Let others help. If you feel you can't move forward, reach out for support from others. Read about or ask how others how they made it through grief.

Seek calm. Meditation and relaxation can provide peace of mind and a feeling of calm.

The Grieving Soul — Your sense of meaning

When children die before their parents, it feels as if the natural order of the world is upside down. Many of the ways you looked at the world may not seem right anymore. You may view your spiritual beliefs differently. Being angry and upset doesn't mean you need to abandon your spiritual foundations. They can still provide comfort. Know that you are just seeing them with a wounded heart. You may:

- Feel reassured that what you believe helps you understand this trial and how to go on.
- Have questions about your beliefs and begin a new search for understanding. Ask for the strength to live with mystery.
- Feel alone with your grief, even in ways that not even your spiritual leaders can fully understand.
- Struggle with the question of whether this was God's will. Know that you can still hold close the beliefs that provide comfort.

What May Help

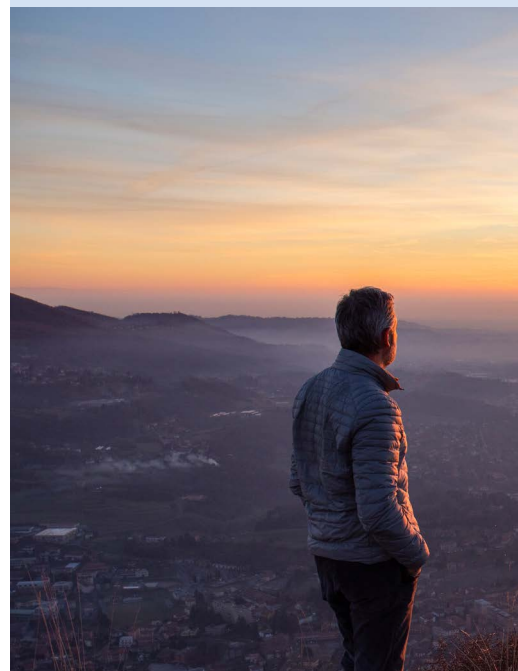
Take care of yourself. Try to identify the things that make you feel grounded. These could be your values and beliefs, your garden, or your daily routine. Or they could be creative activities such as cooking or painting that will help you focus on the beauty of the physical world.

Feel what you feel. Talk about your feelings, whatever they are. Create a special place—either indoors or out—where you can mourn for your child.

Let others help. Some people who understand death differently than you may say things that seem insensitive. Remember that most people are trying to comfort you in the best way they know how. Seek out someone who can understand your spiritual perspective.

“I grew up believing that by being good I could help keep bad things out of my life. And I bargained with God for a whole year to keep my boy alive. I did everything I was supposed to. And it didn't work. It doesn't matter what your religion is or what you believe in — I still go to the same church and everything. But there's no answers that make all the pieces fit together. You still have a big hole.”

— Marcos



GRIEVING IN YOUR MARRIAGE

Your grief over your child's death is intensely painful and difficult for both of you. In your marriage, you may have more trouble communicating, more misunderstandings, and more tension. It may be difficult to see your spouse handling it so differently than you do. Here are a couple of things to keep in mind:

- Remember that no two people grieve in exactly the same way. Try to respect and not judge the way your partner is coping with this loss.
- Remember your commitment to one another. Schedule time to be together, to go on long walks and talk together, and do things that might bring comfort to one or both of you. Try to help each another through verbal praise, physical touch, and understanding.
- Couples counseling may also help you learn how to manage this process together.

Grieving in Your Relationships

The death of a child can put a strain on many relationships. Some people will have an awareness of your needs and others won't. They may be at a loss on how to be helpful. The following pages describe some of the thoughts and questions that may be running through your mind.

What you may be thinking:

- **"Why are people avoiding me?"**

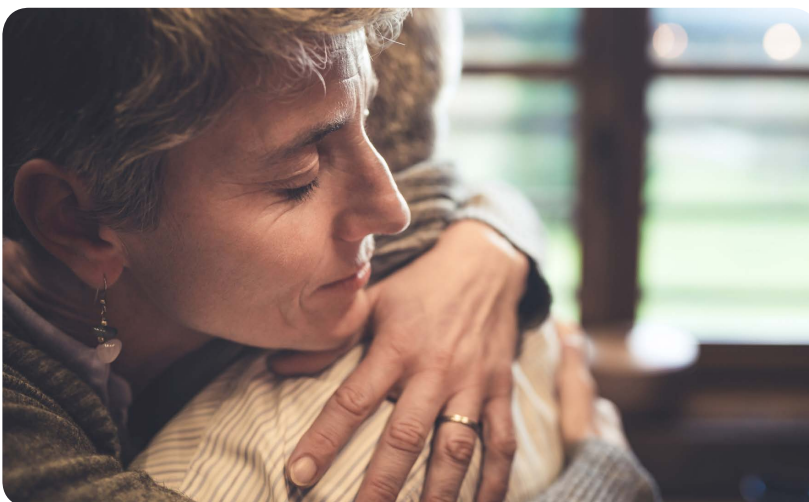
Many people don't know what to say and are afraid of upsetting you. They want to make you feel better and don't know how. Some need to be asked to help with specific things as they are unsure of what to do.

- **"No one can ever understand—even my spouse has no idea what I'm going through."**

It's true. Everyone in the family is hurting and as they work through their grief they may be unaware of how this impacts others. Continue to talk about how you're feeling and be patient with others. If there's something you think might help, you have the right to ask for it. Consider joining a bereavement support group to be with others who are trying to cope. See the Resources listed on page 24.

- **"People keep expecting me to be over it, and I'm not."**

Even those who have lost a loved one themselves might expect you to move through your grief faster than you can. Not everyone understands that you have to go through this at your own pace—and handle it in your own way. But you do, and nobody should expect you to do otherwise.



Advice for family and friends:

Below are some things you might find yourself thinking — and some ideas that may help you support a grieving parent.

- "I don't know how to respond and I'm afraid I'll make things worse. I should probably stay away."

They've already lost a child. Don't let them lose you, too. Be there for them and listen. Help with daily tasks. Be looking out for when they might need you.

- "I don't know what to say. I don't want to upset them."

Nothing you say is going to take away the pain. But here are some things that may comfort you both:

- Tell them how sorry you are, and how much you care. Then let the bereaved parents do most of the talking. Letting them talk about it over and over will help them.
 - Talk about the child's unique and endearing qualities. Share stories you remember about the child. Use the child's name.
 - Resist the urge to find a positive moral lesson in this death. Don't point out that at least they have other children (children are not interchangeable). Don't make comments suggesting that the care given to the child was inadequate.
- "I don't think she's dealing with it in the right way."
Bereaved parents will often act in ways that may seem inappropriate or hard to understand. Be patient and understanding. If you're truly worried that they're grieving in an unhealthy way, talk to a professional about your concerns.
 - "They should be feeling better by now."
No one can predict how long the grief process will take. It takes longer than most people think. Telling them they should be better by now won't make them get better faster. Help them include their child in their lives. Their child is present in their hearts and minds, even if they are not physically present.



A NEW SET OF HARD QUESTIONS

Early on you'll have to fortify yourself against unintentionally painful comments. Some people should know better; others have no idea you've suffered a loss.

It helps to have already thought through answers to the questions that people are likely to ask, such as:

- How was your summer?
- When is your baby due?
- How many children do you have?

New Roles, New Friends— Building a “New Normal”

In many ways, you’re the same person you were before your child died. But now so much is different. Your role as a parent of that child has ended. If you were home with the child, your daily routine is now shaken.

Learning how to adjust to this new role will be part of your grief and mourning process. Another part will be about adjusting to other relationships built around those roles. Friends who know you primarily through your child—such as parents of your child’s friends—may not know how to act around you. Other people may feel uncomfortable talking about their children around you. These relationships may make you uncomfortable as well.

Some relationships will survive these changes, and others won’t. It’s an extension of your loss that can be surprisingly painful. Keep in mind that from the position you’re in now, there are other people—unknown or those you’ve not noticed before—with whom you can connect and build new relationships.

This is part of building your “new normal.” Life will never be the way it was before. But, new people, new activities, and new roles will one day feel more comfortable and be a big part of who you are.

“When Sam was sick I had a neighbor who came over to help me almost every day. Then as soon as he died she stopped coming. She would hardly look at me anymore. I had thought she was my friend and I couldn’t understand what happened. Much later I realized that she was grieving, too, and that she didn’t know how to be around me without Sam. We never did become close again.”

—Julia



Mourning

“I dreaded going back to work, but it was exactly what I needed. I needed a routine. I needed to have a place to go every day where I was expected to get dressed and be able to talk about something other than Lucas. I hated it at times, but I know it really helped.”

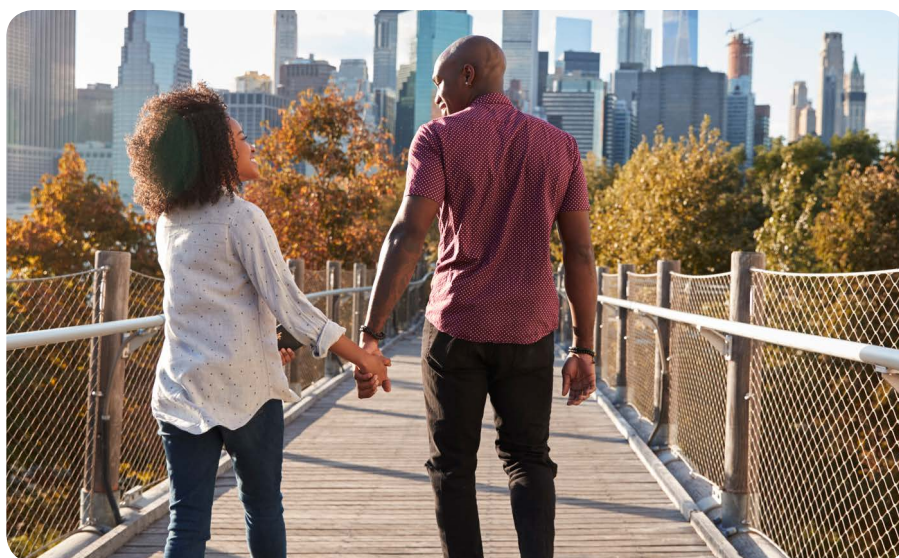
— Robin



Once the initial shock and the attention have passed, you'll still need to live through your everyday life. The way you choose to live with your child's death is part of your mourning. You will learn to make choices one day, one hour at a time. Building a new routine can help bring stability. All the special days of the year—holidays, birthdays, celebrations—can include expressions of mourning. Taking one step at a time can help you address those special moments in meaningful ways.

NOT NOW

Major decisions or life changes—moving, changing jobs—may tempt you, but they're not a good idea right now. Give yourself some time to adjust to your new reality before you make big changes.



Day by Day

It takes time to figure out how to be in the world without your child. You don't need to tackle all your problems at once. But it's a good idea to start thinking about how you're going to build your life again. Here are some ideas that may help:

- **Give yourself plenty of time.** Spend time alone, and spend time with others. Don't try to do as much as you used to in a day. You may notice that your priorities have shifted during this experience and how those changes affect the choices you make now.
- **Express your feelings.** Writing your thoughts and feelings in a journal can help you sort through them. It can also allow you to look back and see the progress you're making. You can also express yourself through music and art.
- **Take care of yourself.** You're going to need extra strength for a long time. Eat at least two healthy meals a day, drink lots of water, and get plenty of sleep. Try to build regular exercise into your day, even if only for a few minutes. If there's anything that makes you feel better, treat yourself now and then.
- **Set small goals for every day.** Your goals can be simple: getting dressed for the day, meeting up with friends, doing an activity you enjoy. Give yourself a pat on the back for everything you do.
- **Have a plan for the day.** Sticking to a daily routine may give you a sense of order. Grief can cause you to forget things, so you may find it helpful to keep a calendar to help you remember what's on your to-do list.

Holidays and Special Days

Some days—holidays, birthdays, graduation days—are just more difficult. When everyone else is celebrating, you may be feeling a terrible hole in your heart. It's important to think and talk about your child and to recognize your feelings on these days. This is a chance to remake these days in a new way. It may help to do the things below:

- **Plan ahead.** Discuss with your family how you want to spend the day. Don't expect others to read your mind, and allow others to make their own choices that you didn't expect. Plan on extra time to remember your child in a special way.
- **Choose your company.** Holidays and special days are hard times to be alone but also offer opportunities to do things differently. New activities bring new people into your life. Volunteering in the community is a good way to help others when you are hurting.
- **Choose your parties.** Everyone in the family should know it's okay to participate, to watch, or to choose not to attend activities with family or friends.
- **Choose the traditions you'll celebrate.** Traditions are symbols of happy times together. Keep the ones that still make sense, but don't feel obligated to bake or send cards if you don't feel like it. This may be a time to explore new traditions and give yourself the freedom to reconsider these changes next year.

Anniversary Reactions

As the anniversary of your child's death approaches, feelings of intense anxiety and pain may return along with memories of the event. While still painful, these times can provide an opportunity for further healing. Acknowledging them can help you develop a perspective on your loss and understand how it fits in your life now.

“I have a corner in my room where I keep Nellie's picture and her blanket and her favorite doll that she had matching pajamas with. I put candles there too, and on Nellie's birthday I light them and pray for her.”

—Tammy

“The hospital took a picture of our stillborn baby. Before this happened to us, we would have thought taking a picture was sick. But we keep that picture on a wall in our room. It’s the only picture we have of her, and the only thing to show who she really was.”

—Lori

YOUR BABY

If your child was a baby who died either during pregnancy or at birth, there are no common memories of a life shared together, no memories to share with friends. You may feel more alone in your grief. So it’s especially important to find ways to show his or her importance to you.

Rituals and Remembrances

You’ve had no control over much of what has happened as a result of your child’s death. But mourning rituals are something you can choose. How you choose to remember your child is personal. Choose what means the most to you and your family. Meaningful rituals can help you remember and heal. Here are some examples:

- **Rituals for birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays:**

- Light a special candle in honor of your child.
- Eat your child’s favorite foods.
- Visit the cemetery and take a gift for your child.
- Release a balloon with a note or wish to your child.
- Plant a tree or garden where you can go and remember your child.

- **Expressions:**

- Write letters, poems, or music to your child and put them in a special place.
- Create a new tradition in memory of your child.
- Keep a journal of your grieving (perfect grammar not required). Write down how you feel. Write about who was there. Record the advice you were given. Discuss your personal triumphs and failures. Date each entry.

- **Mementos:**

- Make a memory book with photos and written memories.
- Create a memory box of your child’s favorite things.
- Put something special of your child’s in a prominent place.
- Make a quilt from your child’s favorite clothes.

- **Giving to others:**

- Contribute to your child’s school, or to a foundation dedicated to fighting the cause of your child’s death.
- Volunteer to help others in a way that is meaningful to your family.

Progress



“For the first two weeks after he died, I sat in bed and ate cookie dough and bananas. If people wanted to talk to me they had to come into my room. Eventually I started getting up sometimes. There are still days I just want to stay home in bed, but most days I at least leave the house for a while.”

—Robin

Over time, grief reactions gradually decrease. You may still cry a lot, but not quite as much as before. You may still be unorganized and forgetful, but less so than before. Slowly, the activities of daily life start to feel normal. The following are also hints that you are starting to heal:

When you're on your own

- You know in your heart that your child will never come back.
- It feels good to remember and share your memories.
- You no longer need someone with you all the time.
- You can drive somewhere by yourself without crying.
- The music you shared with your child is no longer so painful and may even bring a smile.
- You don't feel tired all the time.
- Daily life feels more doable.

When you're with others

- Comments people make seem a little less painful.
- You can reach out to help others in similar situations.
- You can laugh naturally and without feeling guilty.
- You can make new friends and enjoy being with them.
- You accept your new life and discover personal growth from the grief you experienced.

What if I keep getting worse?

Your feelings should gradually subside. However, if the feelings you have right now seem harder to bear and last longer than you ever thought possible, it may be time to get professional help from your doctor or a bereavement counselor. This is especially important if you're unable to start returning to the basic activities of normal life, or if your grief is affecting others.

THERE IS HOPE:

Reaching Out

“It’s been 11 years since my darling baby boy died. The friendships I made through the support groups have sustained me. I wouldn’t trade these friends for anything. While everyone else has long forgotten Charlie’s birthday, they always remember.”

— Merrie



Maintaining hope that life will get better can be difficult. As you build a new life without your child, it's important to have the support and understanding of those around you. Friends and family may be helpful, but you may need to seek other sources of support as well. These can include religious leaders, professional counselors, and support and self-help groups.

The willingness to accept support, love, and care from others can help renew your sense of hope.

“There is an alchemy in sorrow. It can be transmuted into wisdom, which, if it does not bring joy, can yet bring happiness.”

— Pearl S. Buck



RESOURCES

The resources listed below and on the next page offer information, support, and the chance to connect with others.

Intermountain Healthcare

Primary Children's Hospital Bereavement Program (801) 662-3778

intermountainhealthcare.org/locations/primary-childrens-hospital/hospital-information/support-services/bereavement-program

Primary Children's Hospital offers support to families who have experienced the death of a child. These include online resources, mailings and personal contact, grief groups, summer camp, and an annual memorial tribute to support grieving parents and siblings. The bereavement department can connect you to resources for Utah, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Nevada. There is no charge for resources or participation.

Other Intermountain hospitals offer bereavement support groups or can connect you to local resources. Call your hospital and ask for Social Work Services.

National organizations

Actively Moving Forward

healgrief.org/actively-moving-forward

AMF, a young adult and college grief support network. These young adults support one another with peer-led grief support groups and are encouraged to participate in community service events in memory of their loved ones. By doing so, they raise awareness about the needs of grieving young adults across the country.

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

afsp.org

Support for loss survivors, education, advocacy and public policy information

Bereaved Parents of the USA

bereavedparentsusa.org

A national non-profit self-help group that offers support, understanding, compassion and hope to bereaved parents, grandparents or sibling struggling to rebuild their lives after the death of their children, grandchildren or siblings.

Eluna Network

elunanetwork.org

Supporting children and families impacted by grief due to death of a loved one from addiction.

National Alliance for Grieving Children

childrengrieve.org

A non-profit organization that raises awareness about the needs of children and teens who are grieving a death.

National Organization for Parents of Murdered Children

pomc.com

Providing support and assistance to all survivors of homicide victims while working to create a world free of murder.

SHARE Pregnancy & Infant Loss

<http://nationalshare.org>

This is a community for anyone who experiences the tragic death of a baby.

The Compassionate Friends

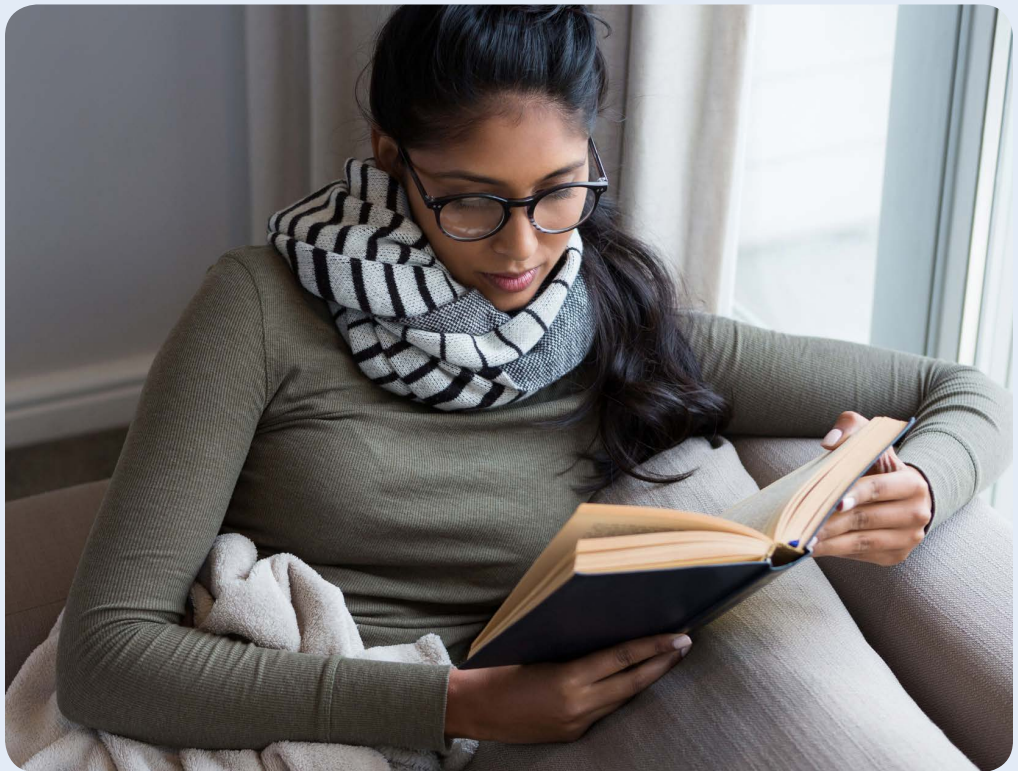
compassionatefriends.org

Whether your family has had a child die (at any age, from any cause) or you are trying to help those who have gone through this life altering experience, The Compassionate Friends exists to provide friendship, understanding, and hope to those going through the natural grieving process.

READINGS

When using books to help children and adolescents cope with death, consider the following from Charles Corr, Ph.D: "Read and think about the book before you share it."

- Read and think about the book before you share it.
- Select titles, topics, and approaches that suit the situation.
- Prepare to cope with the book's limitations.
- Match reading materials to the capacities and concerns.
- Prepare to speak about the book. Think "teachable moment."



Books for Infants and Toddlers

The Goodbye Book by Todd Parr

Cuddle Bear by Claire Freedman and Gavin Scott

Something Very Sad Happened
by Bonnie Zucker

The Purple Balloon
by Chris Raschka

I'll Always Love You
by Hans Wilhelm

The Kissing Hand
by Audrey Penn

Books for Pre-School Children

I Miss You
by Pat Thomas and Chester Raccoon

Acorn Full of Memories
by Audrey Penn

Where's Jess?
by Marvin Johnson

Death is Stupid
by Anastasia Higginbotham

A Terrible Thing Happened
by Margaret M. Holmes

Where Are You?
by Laura Oliveri

Ida, Always
by Caron Levis

Books for School-Age Children

Gentle Willow
by Joyce C. Mills

The Invisible String
by Patrice Karst

Always My Brother
by Jean Reagan

Everett Anderson's Goodbye
by Lucille Clifton

When Someone Very Special Dies
by Marge Heegard

Cat Heaven and Dog Heaven
by Cynthia Rylant

Badger's Parting Gifts
by Susan Varley

The Memory String
by Eve Bunting

Books for Teens

When a Friend Dies by Marilyn E. Gootman

Fire in My Heart, Ice In My Veins
by Enid Samuel Traisman

Healing Your Grieving Heart for Teens
by Alan D. Wolfelt

When Death Walks in
by Mark Scrivani

Chill + Spill
by Steffanie Lorig and Jeanean Jacobs

Weird is Normal: When Teenagers Grieve
by Jenny Lee Wheeler

Books for Parents

A Broken Heart Still Beats
by Anne McCracken and Mary Semel

Surviving the Loss of a Child
by Elizabeth B. Brown

Grief One Day at a Time
by Alan D. Wolfelt

Beyond Tears: Living after Losing a Child
by Ellen Michell, Rita Volpe, Ariella Long, Phyllis Levine, et. al

After the Darkest Hour the Sun Will Shine Again: A Parent's Guide to Coping with the Loss of a Child
by Elizabeth Mehren

Books for Grandparents

Healing a Grandparent's Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas after Your Grandchild Dies
by Alan D. Wolfelt

Grandparents Cry Twice: Help for Bereaved Grandparents
by Mary Lou Reed

A Grandparent's Sorrow
by Pat Schwiebert

Healing After Loss: Daily Meditation for Working Through Grief by Martha Whitmore Hickman

To find this booklet and other patient education, go to:
intermountainhealthcare.org