



Grieving the Loss of a Child

If you talk to parents about their greatest fear in life, the death of a child inevitably tops the list. It is understandably accepted as among the most grievous of losses; the one that most parents cannot imagine surviving. Our minds reel at the very thought. The death of a child violates our every expectation about the nature of life. Regardless of age, we know it is not right that our child die before we do. We want to scream, "It's not fair!" We can feel the outrage well up inside of us. We feel as if a piece of us died too, and in a way it has. A child is our closest living connection, literally carrying a part of who we are within them. For parents and survivors who loved this child, there is soul-gnawing, gut-wrenching pain that cannot be easily eased. Yet in time, the pain does pass and parents do survive.

Mothers and fathers often grieve differently because their roles and relationships with their child were different. We may experience different thoughts and emotions, in timing very different from our spouse. Couples are rarely "in sync" with one another's grief, making it difficult to reach out to each other despite our best intentions. We may mistake our numbed feelings for falling out of love with our spouse. Be assured that feelings do return. Because of the pervasive effects of grief, many relationship issues are also affected, including sex, finances, parenting other children, extended family and daily functioning. The stress on the relationship resulting from these factors leads to a high rate of failed marriages and suggests that professional help is often appropriate. With understanding and adequate support, it is possible for a marriage to grow and become even stronger through grieving the death of a child.

This material provides a general overview of the topic. Particularly in legal and financial areas, you should consult with your personal advisor. Health information is not a substitute for diagnosis or treatment by a therapist, physician or other health care professional. Contact a health care professional with any questions or concerns about specific health care needs.

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