

In the Beginning...

Your child has died. As a newly-bereaved parent you have experienced the most devastating life-changing event. Your whole world has been shattered and you are in a new world now. You will be relearning how to survive when at times you won't even want to survive. The only hope I can give you is that we in The Compassionate Friends have survived and we are here to help you. It won't be easy but keep in mind, *if you hadn't love so much you wouldn't hurt so much now.*

"How long will it last?" is probably the first question we hear from ones like you new to grief. It is a very important question to us at the beginning. Professionals have tried to place timetables based on their studies, and you will hear "two years" quoted, but those of us who have been down the road a number of years will tell you that you will not "get over" the death of your child in two years.

You probably never will "get over" his or her death, but you will learn to live with the fact of it and rejoin life and lead a normal life again; it will just be different from before.

There is no timetable on grief. Some work through the process sooner than others but for us who are bereaved because our child died, grief is no longer and more devastating than grief from any other death in our lives. We operate on our own individual timetable; we cannot judge our progress or lack of it by anyone else.

Grief is a process, a moving through. Sometimes we go forward, but sometimes backward, and sometimes we get "stuck" for a while, but keep in mind it is a process and eventually you will move through it. Within this process there are "stages". We're told those stages are shock, denial, anger, bargaining, and acceptance. They don't necessarily come in that order.

Most of us do experience shock and denial or disbelief first. We can't believe it has happened; there must be a mistake! This happens to other people, not us! That shock is so tremendous that it affects us physically as well as psychologically. It is marked by a lowering of blood pressure, coldness of the skin, rapid heartbeat and an acute sense of terror. That shock insulates us and allows us to go through our duties and do things at this time that we never could have done otherwise. I praise that shock because it keeps us from dying too. That shock allows some of us to carry on with grace and skill during the days surrounding the death and the funeral. That same shock knocks some of us into merciful oblivion and we don't remember a thing during that time. We are all individuals and we react differently during grief, but there are common reactions we all share. This is why you will find very quickly that the only one who really understands what you are going through is another bereaved parent.

Anger, another stage, may come at any time. It is a very natural, normal reaction; don't be afraid or ashamed of it. Know it is okay, you won't always feel this way, there is nothing wrong with you for feeling this way - most of us feel some anger toward

something, someone, even at God, even the child in some instances. You have been hurt beyond your wildest imaginings. I have described my own anger as rage. Society frowns on anger so don't expect always to be treated kindly when you display it, but remember you have a right to be angry. Anger is often unfocused and we sometimes take it out on innocent people. Medical personnel are often the first to receive this anger and funeral directors are next in line. Later that anger can attack anyone who crosses our paths. It is good to recognize anger and try to focus it, learn to use it as a tool. Take up social issues, find healthy outlets for it. It is important to do something physical about anger. Hard work and sports are ways, and we've heard many stories of chopping wood, buying dishes at garage sales and breaking them when we need an outlet. Scream in the shower, in your speed boat or closed up in your car, but get it out. **Anger turned inwards becomes depression.**

With the death of our child everything we ever believed in is shattered. In my own case I had to struggle for a long time to even figure out what I HAD believed in; I was so confused. Our egos, our beliefs in ourselves,

You will have a strong need to talk. You will find that you can talk more than one person can listen, so seek out several good friends who will let you talk to them. You will find some at the Compassionate Friends meetings. You will need to tell your child's story over and over again. You will need to talk about the whole life and death and what you are going through now. Talking is therapeutic. Talk, and talk, and talk, until your story is told.

At night you may go over the events again and again and again, night after night. this is called obsessional review. Sleep disturbances are not unusual. We either can't sleep or sleep too much.

We suffer guilt, real and imagined. We recall punishments and in turn punish ourselves with them when at the time the punishment was probably fair. we remember things we did and things we didn't do. We go through the "if onlies." If only we had or hadn't.....

Beware of isolation. We need to be with people, not alone. When we isolate ourselves with no one to talk to about our feelings, we become depressed; and isolation plus depression equals suicidal feelings, and that spells real trouble.

We are fatigued, lack motivation, we suffer numerous physical complaints, headaches, stomach disorders, we are either nervous or feel dead inside...many and sundry are our complaints, most of which are normal and to be expected in this time of enormous stress. And always we ask ourselves and others, "Why?W "Why me?" "Why my child?"....Simply because life isn't always fair, my friend....

Your world is topsy-turvy now. nothing makes sense,, nothing fits....family balance is upset, the numbers are all wrong, there is one too many chairs at the table now, so you choke on your food and think of the empty chair. Grocery shopping is a nightmare because your child's favorite food greets you from the shelves of every aisle; you don't

dare think of holidays because you know you'll never survive them without your child. Your child's birthday and the memory of all the joy of that day looms like a mountain far too high to climb....some days all you want is for the pain to stop. some days you just can't get out of bed. Some days you work hard and fast like something has possessed you. Every day you cry. You find you are very lonely even in the midst of a crowded shopping mall. you want to scream at the busy, happy people, "Don't you know my child is dead?" How can they go on as if nothing has happened? No matter how many people you are with, you are lonely.

Compassionate Friends understand; each one of us has had at least one child die. We know what you are going through. We don't pretend to have all the answers, but we want to share this time of your life with you. We want you to know you are not alone.

Fay Harden

TCF/Tuscaloosa, AL

