

Coping with Sudden Loss

Processing the death of a loved one, or anyone in our lives, is always difficult and painful. Working to understand sudden death can be an even more intense emotional experience and can take longer to process due to the overwhelming disbelief that we may struggle with.


Some ideas to keep in mind-

- Don't try to find magic words that will take away the pain. There aren't any. A hug, a touch, and a simple, "I'm so sorry," offer real comfort and support.
- Avoid saying, "I know how you feel." It is very difficult to comprehend the depth of the loss when a child dies, and to say you do may seem presumptuous to the parents, siblings, and peers.
- Avoid using "It was God's will" and other clichés that attempt to minimize or explain the death. Don't try to find something positive in the child's death, such as, "At least you have other children." There are no words that make it all right that a child has died.
- Listen! Let those who are grieving express the anger, the questions, the pain, the disbelief, and the guilt they may be experiencing. Understand that parents, siblings, and peers often have a need to talk about the child and the circumstances of the death over and over again. It may be helpful to encourage them to talk by asking a gentle question such as, "Can you tell me about it?"
- Avoid judgments of any kind. "You should . . ." or "You shouldn't . . ." is not appropriate or helpful. Decisions and behaviors related to displaying or removing photographs, reliving the death, idealizing the child, or expressing anger, depression, or guilt may appear extreme in many cases. These behavior patterns are normal, particularly in the first days and years following the child's death.
- Mention the name of the child who has died. Don't fear that talking about the child will cause the parents, siblings, and peers additional pain. The opposite is usually true. Using the child's name lets everyone know that they are not alone in remembering the child.
- Gently encourage a return to outside activities. Suggest a lunch or movie as relief from the isolation of grief.
- There is no standard timetable for recovery. Grief usually lasts far longer than anyone expects. Encourage bereaved families to be patient with themselves. They often hear, "Get on with your life; it's time you got over this!" Those demands are unfair and unrealistic.

"Grief is **NOT** a disorder,

a disease or sign of weakness.

It is an emotional, physical and spiritual

necessity, the price you pay
for love 

The only cure for grief is to
grieve" -- Earl Grollman