

When A Grandchild Dies

No one expects to outlive their own children, much less their grandchildren. Grandparents have double grief---grief for a grandchild who has died; grief for their own child, the bereaved parent(s). A child or young adult's death seems impossible to bear. It helps to remember that grief has no timetable.

A grandchild's death might revive memories and pain of other losses that seemed long forgotten. While in past generations family members were supposed to "go on" as if nothing had happened, the current emphasis is placed on "healthy" grief and mourning. Suppressed grief is a known cause of both physical and emotional pain.

A family death changes everyone in the family from there on. With time and love, grief eases.

SUGGESTIONS TO GRANDPARENTS: How to Help Yourself and Your Child

---Grown children sometimes expect or take for granted that their parent(s) will "be there" whenever there's a need. If, at first, you are unable to reach out to your grieving child, be patient with yourself. You, too, are grieving.

---To better understand what you and your child are experiencing, read about grief.

---Talk about your grandchild; share both your memories and your present feelings.

---Find a friend, support group, clergy or counselor with whom you can freely talk.

---LISTEN to your child. Respect your child's way of handling pain and expressing grief. Save well-meaning advice about how s/he "should" feel or react.

---"Anniversary dates"---date of death, grandchild's birthday, holidays, etc.---are understandably "memory dates." Visit, write and/or phone your child (and child's spouse) to acknowledge and remember your grandchild's life, and to support the bereaved parents' ongoing adjustment to profound loss and change.

---In the midst of grieving adults, the surviving siblings can feel neglected and/or confused about their own grief. Grandparents can provide comfort and reassurance to other grandchildren, and offer their own children some temporary respite from the demands of parenting.

---If and when possible, grandparents might help with practical matters, such as cooking, laundry, shopping, etc.

---Spend time *alone* with your child. Hold onto HOPE. Hug and hold each other if you are both comfortable doing so. Demonstratively expressing affection is easier for some people and more acceptable in some families than others. *Express* love and care to whatever extent you are each willing, comfortable and able.