



GRANDPARENT'S GRIEF

Bereaved parents must consider the needs of grandparents when a child dies. Grandparents also grieve. In fact, their grief is double; for the child they love and for their own child who is suffering.

Just as the parent does, the grandparent is the knowledge that through the grandchildren they achieve immortality. It is expected that grandchild will carry their name and their memory on through time. At the death of a grandchild, that branch of their family tree is cut off. What should have been will not be. In cases of an only child, there will be no future generation. Just as for the parent, the family of the grandparent will never be complete again. At family gatherings, there is an empty place for the child no longer there.

Feelings of guilt can be strong for grandparents. Survival guilt is the strongest. It is never expected that a grandparent will live longer than their grandchild. Grandparents, especially those in poor health or past retirement age, usually feel that they have lived a full life and that the dead child was denied that opportunity. "Why not me?" is the question most will ponder. The fact that they are still alive while a young child or young adult is dead is difficult for many to bear.

Grandparents feel anger just as parents do. They can be angry with God for taking the child, or even for not taking them. They can be angry with the doctors or nurses, feeling that they did not do enough for the child. They can be angry with the person who caused the death or with the person they feel is responsible for the child's death.

Sometimes the death of a grandchild brings back memories of their own child who has died many years in the past. This can be a painful revival of grief they felt was over. This is a fairly common experience for grandparents since the deaths of children occurred more often before the use of miracle drugs.

In addition to the grief over the death of their grandchild, there is the sadness and pain at seeing their own child in such torment. Seeing one's child in pain and not being able to ease the pain is extremely difficult for grandparents. It leaves them feelings of helplessness and frustration.

Many grandparents try to take over necessary tasks such as cooking or caring for surviving siblings. These chores may seem mundane to grandparents. Bereaved parents need to affirm to grandparents how helpful performing these essential tasks are! No matter how devastated everyone feels, children need to eat, to bathe and be supervised. If grandparents are sick or incapacitated and cannot be of help to their child, they may feel guilty. In today's mobile society, many times grandparents must travel great distances to be with their child. If travel is not possible, this can be a source of guilt.

Many times grandparents feel by not showing their grief. By doing so they are providing physical and emotional strength for their child. This is a mistake. Suppressing the grief is as damaging for the grandparents as it is for parents. This can lead to problems for the grandparents and may be seen by the bereaved parent as a lack of concern.

Bereaved parents need to be open and honest with their parents about their needs. They must let them know how they can help, but at the same time bereaved parents need to be aware that grandparents also need to be consoled and comforted. Mutual sharing of feelings between bereaved parents and grandparents will be helpful to both in the recovery process. The sharing of painful feelings as well as happy memories of the child will be healthy for both sets of parents. It will create deeper relationships between the generations and strengthen family bonds.

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