

A Grandparent's Grief



Phases of Grief: Note: These stages may occur in varying order and/or repeat

1. **SHOCK & DENIAL**- The parents will be stunned one minute and the next feel intense panic, distress, or anger. They may feel that the situation is unreal or not happening to them.
2. **PAIN & GUILT**-Parents may be burdened with a sense of guilt. The parents may have guilty feelings or remorse over things they did or didn't do. Life feels chaotic and scary during this phase.
3. **ANGER & BARGAINING**-Frustration gives way to anger, and those grieving may lash out and lay unwarranted blame for the death on someone else. Often help is needed to control this, as permanent damage to relationships may result. This is a time for the release of bottled up emotion. They may rail against fate, questioning "Why?"
4. **"DEPRESSION", REFLECTION, LONELINESS**- The parents often talk about having a feeling of emptiness, lifelessness, and hopelessness. They have little to no interest in activities they once enjoyed. They may neglect their personal appearance and daily tasks.

Just when you may think your child should be getting on with your life, a long period of sad reflection will likely overtake them. This is a normal stage of grief, so do not try to "talk the parent out of it". During this time, your son/daughter may finally realize the true magnitude of the loss. He/she may isolate on purpose. You may sense feelings of emptiness or despair.

5. **THE UPWARD TURN/ Periods of Feeling Normal Again**: As the parent starts to adjust, life becomes a little calmer and more organized. As physical symptoms lessen, and the "depression" begins to lift slightly. The parents may begin to branch out to friends and activities.
6. **RECONSTRUCTION & WORKING THROUGH**-As parents become more functional, and the mind starts working again, they may begin to seek realistic solutions to problems posed by life without their baby.
7. **ACCEPTANCE & HOPE**-During this, the last of the seven stages in this grief model, there is acceptance. Acceptance does not necessarily mean instant happiness. The grieving parent will find a new normal, and laugh and have fun again. Through faith they may discover true peace and a renewed energy for life. They may start to look forward and actually plan things for the future.

Support for

Grandparents

*Suffering the loss of
a grandchild*

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Gently promote Heaven's Gain Ministries' on-line support group which meets the 2nd Thursday of each month contact [Kim Kelley](mailto:Kim@heavensgain.org) @ (513)619-0100 or email Kim@heavensgain.org

As a grandparent, your grief is two-fold. You have been through the devastating experience of losing a grandchild. This loss is not in the

natural order. You are in shock and feeling profound sadness at the loss of your grandchild. At the same time, you are watching your child experience one of the most unimaginable situations in life; the death of one's own child. The helpless feeling of not being able to dry the tears and kiss away the hurt can consume you. The pain your child feels today cannot just be hugged away.

"You want to take away the hurt and take it on yourself, which is impossible." - a grandfather

Although you may feel the need to take charge of your child's life at the time of a loss, most agree that the best role a grandparent can take is a supportive one. For example, making decisions for the parents, such as funeral arrangements or putting away the child's things, is often an important step in the healing process for the parents, and it is helpful for them to have a part in it. It is suggested that a grandparent may assist decision making instead of taking charge. Always be respectful of boundaries. Let your son/daughter tell you how best to help.

As a grandparent, you have an important role at this time. You will always have some influence over your children no matter how old they become, but you still need to recognize your child's need to make it through this experience in his or her own way.

Your child may need some guidance about seeing and holding the baby. Some parents do so eagerly and may ask for this as their parental right. Others may feel they cannot hold the baby, or feel unsure if they would like to. If they see the grandparents cradling the child, it may give them the "permission" they need to do so. Although many are comforted by those tender moments together, not every parent or grandparent desires to hold or see the baby. If you wish to hold the baby, please ask.

Things Grandparents should not say:

In an attempt to relieve the pain and suffering of your son/daughter, you may struggle with words or comfort. Please think before making these kinds of comments. They add additional guilt and pain to the parents, as well as cause a rift in your relationship. Your child needs your comfort the most.

- "You can have other children."
- "We thought you got pregnant too soon."
- Maybe you shouldn't have been working/running, etc. so hard."
- I told you that you weren't eating right or taking care of yourself."
- "You should just be happy with the children you have."
- "You have too many children already."

Things Grandparents should say:

- Use your grandchild's name.
- Refer to the baby as your grandchild. Count the baby as one of your grandchildren. This will ease the parents fear of the child being forgotten or somehow being erased from the memories of the family.
- You will always have memories, although brief, of your grandchild. Try to keep room in your heart for the infant who has died, even as new grandchildren are born.
- Ask the parents if they would like help telling other about the baby's death.

*"We hurt twice.
We hurt for our children because they are our children.
Plus, we hurt for the grandchild we lost."
--a grandmother*