

Grief of the newly bereaved



Grief like no other

The death of your child is simply unthinkable. It is the wrong natural order of life.

“you expect to bury your parents and grandparents but I never expected to be burying my son”.

Even if you have been living with the knowledge that your child has a life limiting condition, the devastation felt when they die is overwhelming. Parents say that their life changes at that moment and the painful and emotional journey of living with your grief begins.



Grief is unique

Grief is as unique as a fingerprint. How you will be feeling will be exclusively your experience and there is no right or wrong to how you or others grieve at this time. You may find that how you feel changes by the minute, hour or day and you can be surprised by some of the emotions you express.

“I can feel I am having a better day and then suddenly be overwhelmed with tears and sadness and I don't know why that happened.”

You may feel absolutely exhausted and either sleep endlessly or are unable to sleep at all. You may experience physical aches and pains and parents say that if they have a ‘weak spot’ such as headaches, skin allergies or stomach problems, these can tend to flare up. Parents may feel a sense of disbelief but also ‘flashbacks’ to what happened. Feelings of anger and guilt about your child’s care may also be part of your thoughts.

“I just keep thinking ‘why’ and did I or someone else do something to make this happen”.

Parents have said holding onto facts and rational thoughts can help when these questions enter your mind.



Grief and Relationships

As grief is individual, you and others close to you can be grieving in very different ways. For example, you may feel comfort in talking about your child and others may not be able to mention their name. It is common in a relationship for one person to be more emotional in expressing their grief and the other may be more practical in terms of organising the funeral etc.

“I just want to sit and cry but my partner seems to be able to put his grief in a box and go to work.”

Grief can be experienced like a game of snakes and ladders. Your grief starts with the throw of a 6 and therefore different for everyone in the family. One day you may feel you have gone up a ladder because something has happened to make you smile or remind you of a happier time with your child. On another day you may feel you have gone down a snake, perhaps it's your child's birthday or you saw their favourite food at the supermarket. All the family will be on the board but it is rare you are on the same square together. Parents report that the death of their child can both strengthen and crumble a relationship but sharing how you feel with each other and acknowledging that you are grieving differently is a help.

“understanding that we were grieving differently and accepting this was ok, saved my marriage”



Living with your grief

Parents have said that family and friends assume that your grief will disappear over time and you will 'get better'. Parents say that *"you don't get better, you get better at it"*. You will find ways to live with your grief and it will become part of who you are. Parents tell us that their grief is their child and therefore you will always want to feel it. You may feel concerned about remembering your child's voice, smell and touch but after many years' parents say they can still recall everything about their child. Parents will create memory boxes or areas in their homes with precious mementos and create photo books, journals (which can help explain your child's story to future children) or cushions from their child's clothing for example. Thinking about anniversaries and birthdays can be very painful and the anticipation of these events can be overwhelming. It is important that you do whatever feels right for you and your family on these days, there is no right or wrong. Some families will do the same every year e.g. release balloons, visit the memory tree at the hospice, others will do something different every year. You will find a way to continue a connection with your child whether this is visiting their grave and talking to them, lighting a candle every night, going to their favorite places etc. Grief will continue to ebb and flow over the years and it's important that you recognise at any point when you may need support with your feelings and either talk to family and friends or seek counselling to give you a confidential space to say how you are feeling, that is just for you. *"Being able to talk honestly and openly, without fear of judgment, was a great relief and helped me live on with my child in my heart"*. Parents have also told us it is helpful to meet others with similar experiences *"to be in a room with others who understand without even having to say anything has been such a comfort and I now know I am not alone"*.

These organisations might be able to offer further information and support:

The Compassionate Friends

Support for bereaved parents with a helpline resources and groups for parents.

www.tcf.org.uk

0345 123 2304

Compassionate Friends have a newsletter and online group specifically for childless parents that can be accessed via the website.

The Child Death Helpline

Support for those affected by the death of a child, whether family, friends, or professionals.

Staffed by bereaved parents and supervised by trained counsellors.

www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk

0800 282 986 or 0808 800 6019

Cruse

Information, help and support for anyone bereaved via a helpline, individual sessions and group support.

www.cruse.org.uk/

0808 808 1677

If you would like further advice or to hear about other organisations that can help you, please call our Family Support Line on 01483 230974 or email: familysupport@shootingstar.org.uk