

## When your grandchild dies



### When your grandchild dies?

When your grandchild dies you will experience your own grief of the loss of your grandchild but you may also believe that you cannot protect your child from the overwhelming pain and grief they feel. Grandparents have said that this pain of seeing their child devastated and overwhelmed by grief is almost harder to bear than coping with their own grief for the loss of their grandchild. Grandparents have told us that they feel helpless and also isolated in their grief, *'I should not burden my family with my grief as it is my daughter's child not mine'*. They also say they feel survivor guilt and say *'this is the wrong order of things - it should be me'*. Grandparents also say they mourn the loss of the future of their family – the ongoing legacy of family stories and important items that would have been handed down to their grandchildren can contribute to a great sense of loss.



### Helping yourself

Grief is as individual as a fingerprint and everyone within the family will be reacting in different ways at different times. You may have already had experiences of significant bereavements of your own parents, partner or friends and these feelings of loss may resurface now. You may feel that at times you are exhausted, have physical aches and pains, changes to appetite and sleep patterns as well as feeling sad, anxious, angry or depressed. Talking to a friend or relative to share your feelings and memories of your grandchild can be very helpful, as will remembering to look after yourself, eating well and having a good sleep pattern. Expressing feelings such as anger safely through exercise or writing your thoughts and feelings down just for your own eyes can help. Meeting with others in a similar situation can reduce feelings of isolation. A grandparent told us, *'Just being in the room with other bereaved grandparents is a comfort and hearing their stories helps me feel I am not alone'*.



### Helping your child

One grandad said, *'I just want to hug my son but I don't know if that's ok'*. The way your child may be expressing their grief may be very different to you and it can be hard to know what to do. One thing to remember is that you cannot take their pain away and can only be alongside them in grief. They may want and seek comfort from you or not talk or share with you how they are feeling – both these responses are very normal. Talking about your grandchild, saying their name, sharing memories can be very comforting to your child. However, existing relationships and circumstances within the family may affect how you can help, for example, you are an in-law, step grandparent, or at a geographical distance. You may be able to offer practical help such as caring for other grandchildren, looking after pets, helping with household tasks but you will also need time to look after yourself. Bereaved parents may find support outside their families to find a way to live with their grief, but you can always let them know you are there for them and thinking of them and your grandchild.



### Helping your other grandchildren

If there are other children in your family, you may be able to provide much needed comfort,

stability and support when their lives will seem very different. Children and young people may feel they will 'upset' their parents if they share their feelings with them and therefore may choose to talk to you. It is important that families use the same words so that children receive the same message about what has happened, including spiritual beliefs the family may have. If you are unable to see other grandchildren, keeping in touch directly with them through cards, texts etc can be very comforting.



### **The future**

Families have told us that, with time, 'the grief doesn't get better, you get better at it'. Grandparents say they find ways of living with the memory of their grandchild whether this is a routine of remembering them at significant occasions, visiting places that give comfort or growing plants in the garden you feel they would like and giving cuttings to family and friends. Talking about your grandchild to family and friends can continue to be a comfort for years to come.



### **Meeting other bereaved grandparents**

Grandparents have told us that meeting others in a similar situation has been a great comfort to them and have said:

*'It's helped knowing we are doing the best we can';*

*'Being able to talk, share, cry and laugh about my grandchild has been so helpful';*

*'Knowing other people feel the same made me feel less alone with my grief';*

*'Getting tips, ideas and knowledge about other families' grief helps us think we can cope with this'.*

### **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](http://www.tcf.org.uk)**

0345 123 2304

#### **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](http://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/](http://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](mailto:familysupport@shootingstar.org.uk)