

It is with sadness that we at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin extend our sympathy to you.

We know nothing worse can happen to a parent than to have a child die. We also know there are no words that can take away your pain. Be gentle and patient with yourself.

Grief is different for each person, but necessary to heal. There is no way around grief, only through it.

We hope the information in this pamphlet will help you. Because grieving can be frightening and lonely, it is important for you to know you are not alone. There are resources through Children's Hospital of Wisconsin and in the community to help you.

Please feel free to call us.

Children's Hospital of Wisconsin
Bereavement Services
(414) 266-2995



A member of Children's Hospital and Health System.

Grief:

The death of a child



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Grief: What you may experience

Having a child die turns your life upside down. Trying to understand your feelings of grief may be overwhelming. Below is advice from other grieving parents.

- Grief takes longer than most people think.
- Grief takes more energy than you ever would have imagined.
- Everyone grieves differently.
- You will mourn for your child and for all your hopes and dreams that will go unmet.
- You may feel confused and experience reactions that are quite different for you.
- Many people experience a wide range of emotions, including anger, guilt and overwhelming sadness.
- Don't be surprised if you have waves of grief that occur suddenly and without warning.
- It is common to have trouble thinking, making decisions and focusing on routine tasks.
- Your grief may make you feel like you are going crazy.
- You may find yourself questioning your beliefs.
- You may have physical reactions that you need to discuss with your doctor.
- You may find certain activities and days more difficult.
- You may react differently to people and they to you.
- Support sometimes comes from unexpected sources.

Thoughts for the future

We each grieve in our own way. Here are some suggestions other people found helpful.

Be good to yourself

- Take one day at a time.
- Give yourself permission, time and space to grieve.
- Don't try to do more than your energy allows.
- Give yourself time to cry – alone, or with others.
- Do what's right for you.

Be sensitive to others

- Remember, your way of grieving might not work for others.
- Talk about how you are feeling and let other people talk to you about their feelings.
- Don't expect people who have not had a child die to always understand. Forgive them for being unable to know what it is like.
- Sometimes people say things that are not appropriate. Remind yourself that they mean well.

Take care of your body

- Eat balanced meals.
- Get plenty of rest – even if you don't sleep.
- Exercise.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs.

Find ways to remember your child throughout the year

- Do something for others in your child's memory.
- Write your child's story.
- Do something special on birthdays and holidays to celebrate your child's life.
- Start a new family tradition in your child's memory.

Resources

Clergy

If you want to talk to your clergy person, call his or her office. Do not wait for him or her to call you.

Family/friends

Many people want to help, but don't know how. Be specific about what you need; don't be afraid to ask for someone to:

- Answer the telephone.
- Call friends.
- Be with your other children while you have time alone.
- Cook a meal or do some laundry.
- Just be with you.

Support groups

These are groups of people who come together to share their experiences, concerns, feelings and support. These groups can be led by a professional or by parents themselves. They usually are available at no cost.

- Children's Hospital provides grief support groups and community referrals. For information, call (414) 266-2995.
- Compassionate Friends, a national parent support group, may have a local chapter near you. Check your telephone directory or call a hospital close to your home.
- Hospice groups, hospitals and/or funeral homes in your community frequently provide support or can help you find someone who does.

