

Grieving **YOUR CHILD**

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This booklet provides you with practical strategies for healing after the loss of a child – including prenatal, infant, teen and adult children. It also answers some of the most common questions about grief. I hope it helps you as you mourn this loss.

Sincerely,
Jason Troyer PhD



The Loss of a Child of Different Ages

For parents, your relationship with your child begins even before your child is conceived. It begins as hope for having a child – when the child is just a dream for the future. Your relationship with your yet-to-be-born child strengthens upon finding out that your child has been conceived, as you make physical preparations for your child (e.g., buying baby clothes and nursery furniture, etc.), and begin the mental preparations (e.g., considering names, planning for the baby's care, hopes for the future, etc.). These are some examples of how your relationship with your child continues and evolves over time.



That is why the death of any child – whether the loss happens before birth or if your child was an adult – is an extremely painful loss. This section covers some of the specific challenges that arise from the loss of children at different phases of life including prenatal loss, loss of a young child or teen, or the death of an adult child. While this section is written with parents in mind, many of the concepts also apply to grandparents, siblings, adoptive parents, and others who are grieving the loss of a child.

Prenatal Loss & Stillbirth

The loss of a child prior to or during birth is an important loss. Other people may not recognize the strength of the relationship you have with your child – even if you were never able to hold him or her in your arms. They try to help by minimizing the importance of your loss by saying things like, “You can have more children,” and “At least you didn’t get a chance to know your baby – it would hurt so much more.” I believe these people mean well, but they don’t realize that you have been loving your child since before conception, and there is nothing they can say that will take away your grief.



Do not let their comments diminish your relationship with your child or cause you to believe that you are being irrational. Even if the only picture you have of your child is a sonogram, even if you never got to hold your baby, this was still your child. It is an important relationship, and therefore, your child's death is significant. Give yourself permission to grieve at your own pace.

Loss of a Child or Teen

We never expect a child or teenager to die. The death of a child or teen is the tragedy of a life cut short. It doesn't matter if your child was 2 or 19. You have experienced their unique personality, shared in their successes and challenges, and developed hopes and dreams for them. Your daily life was intertwined with theirs – and when they are gone it leaves a terrible hole.

Although any loss of a child or teen is extremely painful, the loss may be especially overwhelming if it was sudden. You may feel anger or disbelief if your child or teen died as a result of an accident. Other common reactions include sadness, shock, disbelief, avoidance, guilt, anger, and many others.

Loss of an Adult Child

Even if your child has grown to be an adult, you still never expect to outlive them. Unfortunately, some people assume you shouldn't feel grief after the loss of an adult child. They may unintentionally diminish your loss by suggesting you have other children upon whom to focus or 'at least' your child lived to adulthood. Furthermore, when adult children die many people focus all of their support on the spouse and children of the deceased, yet fail to recognize the pain felt by parents and siblings.



Honoring & Remembering Your Child

There are many different ways to honor and remember your child. The most helpful ways are those that are meaningful to you and your loved ones. Think about what was important to your child – his or her interests and unique personality. But most importantly, consider what would be helpful for you as you grieve your child. Below are some ideas to help you begin thinking creatively about ways to honor and remember your child.

1) Create a photo album, scrapbook, memory book, video montage, or other visual way to remember your child

Creating a visual reminder of your child can be a wonderful way to honor them. Many people find great comfort in reviewing pictures and videos of their child as a way to remember the happy and important moments of life.

2) Volunteer for or contribute to an organization whose mission you support

Many grieving people find it necessary to do something active as part of their grief response. Volunteering at an

organization that was meaningful to your child can help you feel a connection to them. You can also share your time or money with organizations that help children (e.g., child advocacy organizations, Boys and Girls Clubs, St. Jude's Children's Hospital, etc.) as a way to honor your child's legacy.

3) Keep a Special Reminder

Parents (as well as grandparents and siblings) may feel extremely lonely after the loss of a child – this is a natural reaction. It may help you to carry a reminder of your child. For example, you might carry a picture, a significant piece of jewelry (e.g., pendant or ring with your child's fingerprint, etc.), or something else as a way to continue to feel close to them. Let me assure you that there is nothing unhealthy about doing this.

4) Ongoing Rituals and Moments of Significance

There are many ways that you can continue to feel connected to your child. Examples of daily, weekly, or monthly rituals include saying 'good morning' to your child's picture as you get ready for the day, including them in your daily prayers, releasing balloons on their birthday, visiting their gravesite or other important location on a regular basis, and many other possibilities. Just as your relationship with your child was built upon many daily interactions, so too can your connection be maintained with daily moments of remembrance.



Important Reminders

❖ The loss of a child – whether the loss happens before or during birth, as a child, teen, or adult – is always a significant and painful event.

❖ There is no set time period for grieving the death of a child, but the consequences of this loss are often experienced longer than most people expect and will likely follow you the rest of your life.

❖ Normal reactions immediately following the death of a child include sadness, shock, yearning, crying, disbelief, distractedness, confusion, vivid dreams, guilt, anger, irritability, difficulty sleeping, restlessness, loneliness, absent-mindedness, and many others.

❖ Many friends and family members don't know how to be helpful or provide comfort to those who have lost a child.

❖ A continuing connection to a deceased child is often healthy and normal; there is no need to 'cut ties' or try to forget them.

❖ Parents, siblings, and other loved ones can benefit from planning and participating in meaningful grief rituals.

❖ Surviving children will react differently to the loss based on their developmental level and relationship to the deceased. Be patient with children throughout the process of understanding, grieving, and reacting to the loss.

❖ Most parents, siblings, and relatives can adjust to the loss of a child with the assistance of friends and family, but some may benefit from professional assistance.

Need More Help?

Visit www.GriefPlan.com for helpful videos and articles to help you heal, remember, and rebuild after loss. These resources cover topics such as:

- ❖ Helping children as they grieve
- ❖ Healing after the loss of a spouse, parent, child, and other loved ones
- ❖ Dealing with traumatic losses due to suicide, overdose, and accidents
- ❖ Recognizing signs that you may need professional help
- ❖ A step-by-step video program to help you through your grief

About the Author

Dr. Jason Troyer earned his master's degree in counseling and his doctorate in counseling psychology. He is a published author, grief researcher, and former college professor and therapist.

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