

# Fathers Grieve, Too

Most of the time, fathers are neglected grievers. While we know a lot about grief now, people still aren't sure how to respond to a man's feelings. It's safer to ask how your wife is doing than to ask how you feel. And as a man, you have a lot of thoughts and feelings now.

You may feel: angry, depressed, lonely, hopeless, disappointed, confused, hurt, sad, afraid, out of control, confused, empty, guilty, helpless, like a failure, frustrated.

You may have times of real panic and worry about your family. You may have lost the confidence of being the Daddy who makes things right. And you may spend a lot of time asking yourself "Why?"

This can be one of the toughest times in your life, and it's important to take care of yourself and the hurt you're feeling.

Every man is touched by tragedy at some time. You may find you need to be strong and take control. You may feel like you're taking care of everyone else, making all the arrangements and doing all the work. This can be especially true as you make funeral arrangements and greet family and friends. After the funeral, though, people are likely to expect you to act as if nothing happened. One grief counselor said "In our society we're allowed three days of grief...just through the memorial service." You never really "get over" your grief as you begin trying to get back to normal you may find your feelings popping up when you least expect them. Along with some feelings mentioned earlier:

You may feel like you're going through the motions of living. You may feel distant from people. And you may find yourself usually angry.

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## Being Angry

Men and women grieve differently. Women have more permission to cry and talk. Men have more permission to be angry.

It's okay to be angry when your child dies. It's unfair, unjust and an angry situation. The biggest problem with anger is where to direct it. A lot of times dads do get angry at their wives and kids...just because they are around. When you think you're being angry for a long time or more often than you want, you may want to take a look at how you're directing your anger. Talking to another dad whose child has died, talking with your pastor, nurse, social worker or just a friend who can see things clearly can be helpful.

## Talking

One of the things that can help your hurt is talking about your child. You have strong, cherished memories. You have memories of bad and good times and the actual experience of the death. When you don't talk about your child or your experiences and feelings your family may think you're cold and don't care. You may seem distant from each other and out of touch.

If you have trouble talking, you may want to do just a little each day with your wife or friends or both. Remember: Talking may lighten your pain, clear your anger and affirm your feelings.

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## Working

This may be a time when you want to be careful about your work. You may find yourself using your job as way to cover up your feelings. You may work until you become overly tired...hoping it will help you sleep. You may work to try to forget your grief when what you may need is someone to listen to you and show they care. Work can be a distraction and it can be a relief, but it is seldom a total solution to sadness. It can also be very frustrating.

You may find yourself: staring into space when you should be working, making more mistakes than usual, getting fed up when people ask about your wife, not getting the support and care you need.

Some of the support and care can come through your marriage.

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## Your Marriage

A lot of people think a child's death makes couples closer. Actually the opposite can be true. You may both be so wiped out with your grief that you can't lean on each other. You may be scared about what's happening to each other and to your relationship. If that happens remember:

It's important to keep courting...even now. Talk about how you met. Remember how you fell in love. Share what you like about each other. Go out on a date, even if it's a short walk. Touch and hold each other. Realize you each grieve differently - respect each others way of grieving. Accept your first sexual sharing after the death as a warm, gentle caring that brings you close, affirms your tears and quiets your sadness.

See if your area has a group of parents who have experienced the death of a child. If so, go to at least one meeting. Just hearing other fathers talk can make a big difference in how you see your grief, your marriage, your work and yourself. If you're a single father, a group may be especially valuable to you.

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