

HOPES

Healing of Parents Experiencing Sorrow

What's Inside For You

- 3 The Funeral or Memorial
- 4 Taking Care of You
- 5 Relationships
- 6 Kids Can Cope with Death and Dying
- 10 Finding Support and Strength During Grief
- 11 Support and Comfort

HOPES

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LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY
CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Losing a child is one of the most heartbreaking experiences anyone can go through. The shock can feel overwhelming and can turn your world upside down. The HOPES Program is here to support families who are grieving the loss of their child.

We offer this booklet as a resource to help you through this difficult time. While nothing can take away the pain, we hope this information provides comfort and guidance as you walk this unfamiliar and painful path.

Helpful Contacts:

Decedent Affairs
(Mortuary Arrangements
& Autopsy Information)
909-651-4104

Chaplain Services
(Spiritual Support)
909-558-4367

Social Work
(Additional Support)
909-558-4000
*Ask for your unit social worker

Child Life Services
(Support for Siblings and
Other Children in the Home)
909-558-8399

Camp Good Grief
(Weekend Camp for Children
Ages 10-16 for Peer Grief Support)
909-558-4073

**School of Behavioral Health
Resiliency Clinic**
(Counseling Services for Adults
and Children)
909-558-6716

Grief Recovery Group – LLUMC
(Grief Support Group for Adults)
909-558-4367

**Bereavement Website & Community
Support Groups** lluh.org/hopes-program

To Do List:

Although this is a very difficult time, some things need to be taken care of right away. Other tasks can wait until later. This list is here to help guide you through what needs to be done. If you can, ask a trusted friend or family member to help you.

Today or Tomorrow:

- ☐ Notify family members & friends
- ☐ Contact your pastor/clergy
- ☐ Choose a funeral home
- ☐ Call LLUCH Decedent Affairs at 909-651-4104 with the name and phone number of funeral home you choose (leave a detailed message after hours) (Hours: Monday-Thursday, 8:30 – 5:00; Friday, 7:00 – 3:30)

- ☐ Notify your children's school(s) and teacher(s)
- ☐ Notify your place of employment

Within a Week:

- ☐ Plan funeral or memorial service
- ☐ Write an obituary
- ☐ Locate your child's birth certificate and social security card

Within a month:

- ☐ Notify doctor(s)
- ☐ Notify Health Insurance
- ☐ Cancel prescriptions
- ☐ Get duplicate death certificates from the funeral home
- ☐ Notify the Social Security Office 1-800-772-1213
- ☐ Check for any life insurance benefits through credit cards or your place of employment
- ☐ Update your will
- ☐ Update beneficiaries on your life insurance
- ☐ If you are active duty military, contact Veterans' Affairs

How Family or Friends Can Help:

- Clean the house
- Mow the lawn
- Do laundry
- Wash the cars
- Prepare meals/organize others to provide meals
- Get groceries
- Purchase a guestbook to have at your home
- Record the names of those who send flowers or food
- Prepare a photo album or slide show for the memorial service
- Prepare a book in which family/friends can write memories of your loved one
- Take children on an outing or care for them in your home
- Polish shoes for funeral
- Stay at your house during the funeral

The Funeral or Memorial

Having a funeral or special service can be a meaningful way to honor your child and recognize how loved and special they are. These services can also bring comfort to you, your family, and your friends during this difficult time.

The service can be traditional, based on your child's wishes, or something you create in their memory. It can be a way to say thank you for the people who cared for your child and a time to remember them.

Ask a funeral director, hospital chaplain, social worker, or your own pastor or faith leader to help plan a service that fits your beliefs and needs.

Involving Other Children

Parents may wonder if their other children should attend the funeral or memorial service. It is natural to want to protect children from pain, but since the whole family is affected by this loss, children benefit from being included—if they want to be.

Have age-appropriate, honest conversations with them about what to expect with a funeral or memorial and listen to their wishes. Explain what they will see, who will be attending, and what they may feel or experience. Allow them to decide which elements they want to be involved in and how they want to participate. Parents can explain that the funeral is a time for everyone who loved the child to come together, express their sadness, and remember. If children are automatically not involved, they may feel left out or think their presence does not matter.

Being part of the service can help children say goodbye and feel closer to their family. It also helps them begin healing and rebuilding relationships. Some children may want to participate by offering a small gift—like a drawing, flower, or favorite toy—to be buried with their sibling.

Children may find that participating through the full service is overwhelming and may benefit from having a trusted adult who can allow them to take breaks. If a child chooses not to attend the funeral, it is important to create another special way for them to say goodbye and feel supported.

Taking Care of You

Grief after the loss of a child can be very deep and overwhelming. At times, it may feel like it takes more strength than you have. Many people say it feels like a part of them is missing, and they no longer feel whole.

Even in the middle of your sadness, taking care of yourself in little ways will help you take it day by day. Here are a few key areas that may be helpful to consider as you move through this difficult time:

TIMELINE

Each person's grief is unique. There is no timeline to follow or stages to move through in a specific order. Be kind to yourself, patient with your own grief journey and care for the needs you have each day.

NUTRITION

It is common to have a hard time eating nutritiously during grief. Some people eat for comfort, while others lose their appetite. Staying nourished and drinking enough fluids can help you keep up your strength as you face each day.

REST

It may feel like sleep will never come, and nighttime can feel especially lonely. Even if you cannot sleep, try to keep a regular rest schedule. Resting is still important as your body needs that physical rest time as it begins to cope with your loss.

EXERCISE

You may not feel like doing much right now, but gentle activity can help you cope. Simple things—like taking a walk in nature or practicing mindful breathing—can bring a sense of calm and peace. If possible, ask a friend or family member to join you—it can make a big difference.

TALKING

Sharing your feelings and memories are an important part of healing. Some people—even friends or family—may not understand your need to talk about your child. It is encouraged to find a trusted person or professional that you can talk about your child with for as long as you need. Your love and grief are worth honoring.

CRYING

Crying is a natural and healthy way to express grief. Some people try to hold back their tears, but letting yourself cry can bring comfort and relief. It is okay to cry.

WRITING

Keeping a journal can be a helpful way to cope while grieving. Writing down your thoughts and feelings gives you a safe space to express what is on your mind—especially things that may be hard to share with others. Many people find comfort in writing letters, notes, or poems to or about their child.

DECISIONS

After the loss of a child, it is best to avoid making big changes right away. If possible, try not to move, change jobs, or make major life decisions too soon. At the same time, do not let others make decisions for you. Only do things—like putting away your child's clothes—when you feel ready. Take the time you need.

ASKING FOR HELP

It may feel uncomfortable to ask for help, but family and friends often want to support you—they just may not know how. Letting others help with things like meals, childcare, or housework can ease some of the stress during this challenging time. You do not have to do it all alone. Let people assist in ways that feel helpful to you.

KEEPSAKE ITEMS

Many people find comfort in having photos or special keepsakes to look at and hold. If it feels too hard to see them right now, it is okay to put them away. When you are ready, they may bring comfort and help you feel connected to your child.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Joining a local support group can give you a safe space to grieve and connect with others who have experienced similar loss. Loma Linda University Medical Center offers grief recovery groups. To learn more or to register, call 909-558-4367.

You can also find other local support groups, including those specifically for the loss of a child, at: www.lluh.org/bereavement

Relationships

Couples

When a child dies, parents face a crisis unlike any they have experienced before. For some, it may be their first major loss. How they handle the stress during this time can affect their relationship for a long time.

Everyone has a different way of coping with crisis. These personal styles often stay the same during grief—but they can become stronger. For example, a parent who usually stays quiet may become even more silent and withdrawn. A parent who usually talks about their feelings may feel a stronger need to talk and be heard.

Cultural expectations can also add pressure. People often expect women to show more emotion, while men are expected to stay strong and quiet. As a result, fathers may feel like they cannot talk about their sadness—even though they need support, too.

After the death of a child, many couples struggle to connect. Because grief is so unique, each parent may feel they must carry the pain alone. They may want to protect each other from more hurt, but this can leave both individuals feeling isolated and unsupported.

One of the biggest challenges grieving couples face is talking openly with each other. Misunderstandings, past conflicts, and strong emotions like guilt, anger, and sadness can make communication harder. Sometimes, one partner may want to talk while the other feels unable to. You may not feel like you have the language to express your grief or your needs.

It is important to try to understand each other's needs—even if those needs are different. Sharing grief together, even in small ways, can help couples feel more connected. This takes patience and effort, but it can make a difference during this painful time.

There are some positive steps parents can take to care for their relationship and potential communication struggles:

1. **Remember what brought you together.** Think about the strengths in your relationship and what you love about each other.
2. **Spend time remembering your child together.** This could be looking at photos, sharing stories, or even eating your child's favorite ice cream.
3. **Do something you both enjoy.** Even small moments of connection can bring comfort.
4. **Respect each other's way of grieving.** Everyone grieves differently, and that is okay.
5. **Be gentle with one another.** Speak and act with kindness and care.
6. **Ask for help if you need it.** Support groups, counselors, or faith leaders can offer comfort and guidance.

It is important to remember no one else can truly understand the loss of your child the way you both do. You share a deep and unique bond in your grief—and in your love for your child.

Friends

After losing a child, parents need support, comfort, and understanding. Many family members or friends do not know how to respond to grief. They may avoid calling because they do not know what to say or are afraid of saying the wrong thing.

It is important to find someone you can talk to—someone who will truly listen. At first, you may not feel like talking. But as the loss becomes more real, many parents feel a strong need to share their story. Some people may not understand how deep your pain is. They might pull away without meaning to—just when you need support the most. When this happens, support groups, close friends, counselors, or faith leaders can provide a safe space to express your feelings.

As hard as it may be, sometimes the parent must take the first step. Reaching out does not mean you are weak—it shows strength. Let others know what you need. If you want to talk about your child, say so. If talking brings tears but also healing, it is okay to let people know that too. Sometimes others want to help—they just need guidance. Do not feel like you must pretend everything is okay. Be honest with yourself and find trusted people you can be honest with as well.

Your Other Children

The death of a child impacts the whole family. Even very young children can sense there has been a change. While parents are trying to cope with their own grief, it can be especially hard to help their other children work through their emotions. Children may feel confused about what happened. Some may even feel guilty or worry that they somehow caused their brother or sister's death. Like their parents, they are grieving. They may feel sad, angry, or upset that their family unit no longer feels the same.

How parents cope with their own feelings—like sadness, anger, or loss—can help children learn how to manage those feelings too. Watch for signs that your child wants to talk or is looking for comfort. Being open about your feelings shows children that grief is a natural response to loss. When parents talk honestly and gently about their emotions, it teaches children that it is okay to cry, to feel sad or angry—and also okay to laugh or find joy again.

Kids Can Cope with Death and Dying

If there are children affected by this loss, we hope this information helps you support them. No brochure or book can replace the care and comfort your physical presence gives your child, but the suggestions here may help you better understand how children experience grief.

Children do grieve, but they may show it in different ways than adults. They often have many questions and worries but may stay silent unless we invite them to share what is on their minds and in their hearts. Many things affect how a child mourns, including:

- ♦ Their relationship with the person who died
- ♦ How the person died
- ♦ The age of the person who died and the child's age when the death happened
- ♦ Any stigma around the death
- ♦ The child's own personality

Being aware of these factors—and gently helping your child explore them—can support their healing.

Do not underestimate your child's ability to feel, understand, and grow through this experience—especially when they can share it with you.

Some Suggested Do's and Don'ts

Do's

Do tell the child about the death,
in honest, age-appropriate language.

Do answer their questions,
clearly and directly.

Do learn about how children grieve and be patient
—children express grief differently than adults.

Do talk openly about the person who died.
Sharing memories helps children feel connected.

Do make sure their questions are answered.
If you are too upset, ask someone else you trust to talk with them.

Do reassure them that they are safe and cared for.
Let them know someone will always be there for them.

Do let them express their feelings freely.
Do not judge or try to “fix” their emotions.

Do let them attend the funeral if they want to.

Do prepare them for the funeral.
Explain what they might see, hear, or feel.

Do offer a private moment to say goodbye,
if they would like one.

Do allow them to give a personal gift
(like a drawing, toy, or letter) to be placed with their loved one.

Do keep daily routines as normal as possible.
Familiar schedules bring comfort and security.

Do let children stay connected with caring adults
—like family members, friends, neighbors, or others they trust.

Do share your own feelings of grief.
Showing emotions lets children know it is okay to express theirs.

Do lean on your support system.
Reach out to trusted people and groups in your life.

Do ask for help—for yourself or your child—if you need it.
Asking for support is a sign of strength.

Do inform other important adults in your child's life
(such as teachers, coaches, clergy, and babysitters) so they can offer support and understanding.

Don'ts

Don't hide the truth.
Children need honest, age-appropriate information.

Don't keep children away from family gatherings or memorial services.
These moments can help them feel included and supported.

Don't force them to attend the funeral or view the body.
Give them the choice and respect their wishes.

Don't shut down their questions.
Be open and ready to listen.

Don't be upset if they talk to someone else.
Children may turn to teachers, friends, or others they trust.

Don't use confusing phrases or euphemisms for death.
Avoid saying things like “went to sleep” or “we lost her,” as children may take these literally and feel scared or confused.



Normal Grief Reactions of Children

Children may show many different feelings and behaviors when they are grieving. These are all normal parts of healing:

Denial

Pretending the loss did not happen or acting like it does not affect them.

Sadness

Crying a lot, sometimes, or not at all; they may feel tired, restless, or want to be alone.

Fear

Worrying about death—especially their own or other loved ones; needing comfort and reassurance; wanting to stay close.

Anger

Feeling angry at others, themselves, God, or the person who died; this may show in words, actions, or fights with siblings.

Guilt/Self Blame

Thinking “if only...” or feeling sorry; asking questions repeatedly to feel better; blaming themselves secretly.

Regression

Acting younger than their age (like bedwetting or needing a security blanket); this usually improves with support and understanding.

Physical Symptoms

Complaining about minor health issues; changes in eating or sleeping; being afraid to sleep alone or having bad dreams.

Protection

Acting very grown-up to hide their grief and help comfort their parents.

Insecurity

Refusing to go to school; being extra possessive of people, pets, or belongings; keeping or hiding special items connected to the person who died; testing parents or teachers; looking for new people to trust; pushing limits.

Remember

All these reactions are normal. They are part of the process of adapting and healing after a loss.



Red Flags

Like adult grief, children grieve in their own way and time. However, at about three months after the death, watch closely for if these “Red Flags” appear or if normal grief reactions keep getting worse. If you see any of these signs, it is important to offer more support and consider getting help from a professional. There are local resources that specialize in helping children cope with grief.

- ✦ Talking about wanting to join the person who died
- ✦ Giving away their belongings
- ✦ Withdrawing and isolating themselves from others
- ✦ Long-lasting changes in eating or sleeping habits
- ✦ Losing or gaining significant weight
- ✦ Having frequent bad dreams or nightmares
- ✦ Constantly thinking or talking about death, dying, or illness
- ✦ Saying things like, “I wish I had died instead”
- ✦ Problems at school, such as trouble with friends, behavior changes, or falling behind in class
- ✦ Lying often
- ✦ Breaking their own or others’ things on purpose
- ✦ Hurting themselves intentionally
- ✦ Big changes in personality (for example, a quiet child becoming very active or an outgoing child becoming very shy)
- ✦ Refusing to stay with trusted adults
- ✦ Sudden angry outbursts or tantrums
- ✦ Stealing
- ✦ Running away from home
- ✦ Noticeable health problems
- ✦ Being very strict or rigid about daily routines



Finding Support and Strength During Grief

A helpful way to work through grief is to be with others who have experienced a similar loss. Many communities offer support groups where you can share your feelings and journey with people who understand. Finding a group that feels right for you can provide comfort and connection during this challenging time.

Your spiritual beliefs can also influence how you cope with loss. Many parents find strength and comfort in their faith and in their church community's support. Faith can remind you of God's love and support when you need it most.

It is also normal to feel confused, angry, or disappointed with your faith during this time. You might have questions with no easy answers or feel angry with God and wonder how this could be happening. Remember, it is normal to feel this way—God is big enough to handle your anger and your faith can help you find hope and healing over time.

The memories of your child will always stay with you. Your feelings of grief will change over time — they will not always feel as strong as they do right now. Everyone's grief journey is different, but gradually you will find your way toward a new normal. Nothing will take away that your child will always hold a special place in your heart.

Be gentle with yourself as you grieve. Allow yourself the time and space you need and surround yourself with people who can support you along the way.

May you feel God's presence during this time of sadness. In the midst of life's greatest pain, God reminds us that He is with us – always. Today, in your sorrow, may you find comfort in the promise, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." Psalm 30:5



HOLY
BIBLE

Support and Comfort

Footprints

Author Unknown

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonging to him, and the other to the Lord. When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times of his life. This really bothered him, and he questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times of my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why, when I needed you the most, you would leave me." The Lord replied, "My son, my precious child, I love you and would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

Bible Promises

I will never leave or forsake you.

Hebrews 13:5

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters; He restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me.

Psalms 23:1-4

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Psalms 34:18

We Remember Them

Author Unknown

In the rising of the sun and in its going down, we remember them.
In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter, we remember them.
In the opening of buds and in the rebirth of spring, we remember them.
In the blueness of the sky and in the warmth of summer, we remember them.
In the rustling of leaves and in the beauty of autumn, we remember them.
In the beginning of the year and when it ends, we remember them.
When we are weary and in need of strength, we remember them.
When we are lost and sick at heart, we remember them.
When we have joys we yearn to share, we remember them.
So long as we live, they too shall live,
For they are now a part of us, as we remember them.



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