

Death of a Child

As a parent, you devote yourself to your children—their happiness, their well-being, and helping them to thrive throughout their lives. But when tragedy comes and a child dies, no matter what age they may be, it can feel like everything about the present and the future has been shattered.



Parents who have experienced the death of a child constantly carry the weight of grief and the pain of living with their child's absence. No matter what you might be doing—from shopping for groceries to sitting in traffic to walking the dog—the feelings of loss and longing can be ever-present. Meanwhile, people around you move busily forward as if nothing has changed, somehow missing the fact that your world has crumbled and that you are forever changed.

If you are grieving the death of your child or children, we hope that the following offers some support and context for you.

Your Grief

Grief is not just one simple emotion, but an experience marked by a huge variety of emotions that may arise and shift over time — sometimes even from moment to moment. This is completely normal, and there is no right or wrong way to grieve, no timeline, and no rulebook for coping with such a profound loss.

Grief can be disorienting, and some bereaved parents describe it as being in a fog. It can be hard to think, remember, or work. Common functions, like keeping a grocery list or paying monthly bills, may become insurmountable, or you might be able to do them out of habit. Grief also shows up in physical ways; for example, you may feel exhausted beyond words.

The early days of grief are unimaginable, and everything might feel impossibly hard. Over time, what feels so difficult shifts, and new challenges may emerge. For example, the first time you make it through a day without tears may feel as if you're not honoring them. Or, you may feel like you are losing your child all over again as specific memories or feelings begin to slip away because you are not feeling their presence as acutely. It is also common to experience periods of deep grief and pain in the years to come, including around meaningful events or milestones you wish your child was part of.

Knowing how or why to reinvest in life after such a loss is impossible, especially in the first few years. Many parents face a crisis of perspective and feel less purpose in life. How do I imagine myself happy again? Who will fill their seat at the family dinner table during the holidays? Who am I, and what do I believe? This may compel some to leave a job, reorient friendships, or reexamine religious or faith-based beliefs. Losing a child can fundamentally reorganize every aspect of a parent's life.

Even though it can be hard to know why or how to do it, please take care of yourself the best you can, seeking resources for whatever help and support you may need. You may find support and solidarity in connecting with others experiencing a similar loss, as they may be best able to truly understand the depth of pain and the daily struggle involved. Explore Evermore's Grief Support Directory to discover support groups, resources, and communities of bereaved parents.

Your Other Children

Whether they are a young child, adolescent, or adult, bereaved siblings can experience significant grief and disruption when their brother or sister dies, and are at risk of their own hardships. It can be difficult, if not impossible, to support surviving children during such a devastating time, especially when you are grieving yourself. Tap into whatever resources may be available to you and your family. Many well-intentioned people may say, "kids bounce back." While children can often adapt over time, it's important to acknowledge the significance of their loss and support them in their grief, especially as sibling grief is so often overlooked.

Your Only Child Or All Your Children

When you lose your only child or all of your children, you may experience extraordinary hardships, such as the loss of identity. Questions like "Are you still a parent?" can be especially difficult and painful. You may feel that your legacy is gone, or face questions such as "Who will look after me as I age?" and "Who will inherit my possessions and photo albums?" It is often a very lonely, frightening world for parents who have experienced the deaths of all their children.

Your Relationships

Every facet of your life will be impacted by your loss, including your relationships with family, friends, and the world around you.

Your loss is so enormous and profound that it is nearly impossible for most people to be fully supportive or to understand what you are going through. Many bereaved parents feel extremely isolated and let down by friends, family, and colleagues. Sometimes, others may purposely avoid you out of concern that "it" could happen to them. This often has much more to do with people's inability to confront the realities of death than with you or your child. Nonetheless, it may add to the hurt and layers of loss you experience.

Despite the many challenges you will face, there may also be surprising and reassuring discoveries among your family, friends, and colleagues. Some people will step forward and become sound supporters during turbulent times, offering love, compassion, understanding, and practical support. Some of your most steadfast support may come from people who surprise you.