



Helping Bereaved Parents

Who can imagine a more devastating loss than the death of one's own child? Parents in the midst of grief often say that they fear the pain will never subside. Friends and family members who stand by may feel helpless or overly cautious about saying or doing the wrong thing.

This information sheet has been prepared for those who would like to help the grieving parent toward recovery. The following general guidelines are reprinted by permission from: The Compassionate Friends, Inc., P.O. Box 3696, Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696, (630) 990-0010 or toll-free (877)969-0010. Mon.-Fri., 9 A.M. to 5 P.M. Central Time.

The Compassionate Friends is a self-help support group run by and for parents who have experienced the death of a child. There are more than 650 chapters across the United States, and contacts for similar outreaches in Canada and other countries worldwide. Call the U.S. National Office for the group nearest you.

DOs

- Show your care and concern.
- Be available--to listen, run errands, help with the other children or whatever else seems to be needed at the time.
- Say you are sorry about what happened to their child and about their pain.
- Reassure them that they did everything they could; that the special medical care their child received was the best, or whatever you know to be true and positive about the care given their child.
- Allow them to express as much grief as they are feeling and are willing to share.
- Encourage them to be patient, not to expect too much and not to impose any "shoulds" on themselves.
- Allow them to talk about the child they have lost as much and as often as they desire.
- Talk about the special, endearing qualities of the child they have lost.
- Give special attention to the child's brothers and sisters--both at the funeral and in the months to come. They, too, are hurt, confused and in need of attention, which their parents may not be able to give at this time.

DON'TS

- Let your own sense of helplessness keep you from reaching out to a bereaved parent.
- Avoid the hurting parents because you are uncomfortable--being avoided by friends aggravates an already intolerably painful experience.
- Say you know how they feel unless you've lost a child yourself.
- Tell them what they should feel or do.
- Change the subject when they mention their deceased child.
- Avoid mentioning the child's name out of fear of reminding them of their pain--they haven't forgotten it.
- Try to find something positive--a moral lesson, closer family ties-- about the child's death.
- Point out that they have their other children--they are not interchangeable and cannot replace each other.
- Suggest that they be grateful for their other children. Grief over the loss of one child does not discount a parent's love and appreciation of their other children.
- Make any comments that in any way suggest the care given to their child was inadequate. Parents are plagued by feelings of doubt and guilt without any help from family or friends.

The following resources should be available through bookstores, the publisher, the source shown, or can be obtained from Focus on the Family when noted. If you would like to obtain any of these items, simply call our toll free number 1-800-A-FAMILY. You can also visit our Family Store at www.family.christianbook.com.

Books Offered by Focus on the Family

Empty Arms: Hope and Support for Those who Have Suffered a Miscarriage, Stillbirth or Tubal Pregnancy by Pam Vredevelt (Multnomah, 2001). • 38515 •

Emotional support for those who have suffered a miscarriage or stillbirth.

Holding on to Hope: A Pathway Through Suffering to the Heart of God by Nancy Guthrie (Tyndale, 2002). • 64188 •

Nancy Guthrie frames her own loss of two of her children as infants with the biblical story of Job, taking her fellow sufferers by the hand and guiding them on a pathway through pain, straight to the heart of God.

I'll Hold You in Heaven (Healing and Hope for the Parent Who Has Lost a Child Through Miscarriage, Stillbirth, Abortion or Early Infant Death) by Jack Hayford (Regal). • 32594 •

Included are answers to such questions as "Does God have a reason for letting my child die?" and "How can I help a friend who's in grief?" Jack Hayford gently leads the reader to embrace grief, eliminate guilt, and express love to the departed child.

Books

Death of a Little Child by J. Vernon McGee (Thru the Bible Radio, Box 7100, Pasadena, CA 91109-7100)

Comfort for grieving parents who need assurance that even such a brief life has served God's perfect plan.

Sandy: A Heart for God by Leighton Ford (InterVarsity Press)

The moving story of the author's son, whose life was cut short at age 21 by a rare heart disorder but whose Christian witness impacted many others for eternity.

When a Baby Dies by Martha Jo Church, Helen Chazin and Faith Ewald (available from The Compassionate Friends, P.O. Box 3696, Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696, toll-free phone 877/969-0010. Covers decisions after a death, enduring the sorrow, overcoming depression, and making plans for the future.

Compact Discs

- **"Leighton Ford Talks About the Death of His Son"** (Dr. and Mrs. Leighton Ford, Dr. James Dobson) • 5009163 •
- **"Death and Dying: Helping Children Understand"/ "Death and Dying: The Last Thing We Talk About"** (the late Joseph Bayly, Dr. James Dobson) • 5008711 •
- **"Miscarriage: Grieving the Loss"** (Dr. Walt and Barb Larimore, Russ and June Gordon, Dr. James Dobson, John Fuller (co-host). • 5009032 •

Booklets

- **"What You Need to Know About Childhood Leukemia"** is available from the Publications Ordering Service, National Cancer Institute, Suite 3036A, 6116 Executive Blvd, Bethesda, MD 20892-8322 or online at <http://www.nci.nih.gov/cancerinfo/wyntk/leukemia>.
- **"It Hurts to Lose a Special Person"** by Amy Ross Mumford is available from Cook Communications Ministries, Attention: Order Processing, 4050 Lee Vance View, Colorado Springs, CO 80918, (800) 437-4337 or online at www.davidccook.com.

Available from The Compassionate Friends (P.O. Box 3696, Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696, (877) 990-0010, or online at www.compassionatefriends.org):

- **"How Can I Help? . . . When a Child Dies"**
- **"Caring for Surviving Children"**
- **"When a Brother or Sister Dies"**