



## Duke University Health System Bereavement

### Helping Yourself - After The Loss Of A Child



Grieving can be an overwhelming experience. It affects every aspect of your life. During your journey towards healing, it is important to take care of yourself - physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

### **How do I take care of myself?**

**Be gentle with yourself** in the coming days, weeks, and months,

- Mourning takes time – sometimes longer than you might think.
- Give yourself the needed time. Treat yourself as you would a best friend.

**Carry or wear a linking object** – something that belonged to your child (picture, foot/hand prints, lock of hair, clothing), if this is comforting to you.

**Take care of yourself physically**

- Eat a healthy diet – including milk, protein, vegetables, fruit, and whole grains
- Get needed rest
- Exercise daily – physical activity can refresh you and take your mind off your pain for a while. The activity may be walking, swimming, working out, or whatever you enjoy doing.
- Avoid over-use of alcohol or medication. They tend to numb your emotions and delay your grief work.
- *Talk about your thoughts and/or feelings*, as you need to. It can be with your partner, family, or friends. Consider talking to someone outside the family - counselor, faith leader, social worker, nurse or your doctor.

**Write down your thoughts and feelings** – some people find this more helpful than talking.

Ways of doing this are:

- Keeping a journal or diary
- Writing letters to your child, and/or about your thoughts and feelings
- Writing notes or poems

**Read - books, articles, or poems that comfort you.** Reading about how others have dealt with their grief will let you know that you are not alone.

**Look to your faith** (whatever you perceive that to be) – and maintain your spiritual bonds.

Consider the following:

- Religious services and/or ceremonies (memorial service).
- Quiet prayer and/or meditation.
- Involvement in activities in your place of worship.

**Accept comfort and help from others** – admit when you are feeling lonely or are in pain. Your family and friends love you and want to help. Share with them what does and does not help.



## **How do I take care of myself?** (con't)

Give yourself permission to laugh, as well as cry – both are healing.

**Consider postponing making major life decisions** (for at least a year, if possible) such as moving or selling property and belongings.

## **Should I try to forget or keep my memories alive?**

- After a child dies – they will **always** remain a part of your life. Memories are all you have now – ***treasure*** them.
- Share your memories with family and friends who can support you.
- Begin rituals to serve as a tribute to your child's short life, such as:
  - Lighting a candle at mealtime in your child's memory
  - Plant something as a living memorial (flowers, bush or tree)

## **What can I do if I need help?**

Some people find it helpful to talk about feelings and thoughts with someone outside the family. There are people available who understand and care about you.

Some suggestions include:

**Support groups** – A safe place where survivors can share their experiences and support each other.

**Religious/Spiritual community** - People who can help identify spiritual resources that may be comforting for you.

**Bereavement counselors** - Specialists, who help people adjust to the death of a loved one.

**Duke Hospital Bereavement Services** –Bereavement Services provides a clearinghouse for information, resources and support about grief, loss, dying and death. (877-460-7969)

**Local mental health associations** - To get more information and referrals.

## **When do I need to call my doctor?**

- If you are unable to take care of yourself or your family.
- If you have persistent thoughts of or are planning to hurt yourself.
- If you become very depressed and are unable to do activities of daily living.
- If you are unable to sleep or have questions about sleeping.
- If you think that you need medication.