



Duke University Health System
Bereavement
Healing Together – As a Couple

As a couple, you have lost your child and now each of you is feeling your own pain. The pain of saying *good-bye* before your child has had a chance to grow up. In addition to your child having died, you have lost the future for that child – all your hopes and dreams. The death of a loved one, is an experience that changes you forever and it will take time to understand and accept those changes.

- Each of you will experience the pain in your own unique way, coping using your own style, and according to your own timetable.
- Couples often do not grieve at exactly the same time – while one grieves, the other will be providing support and understanding – Later the roles may reverse
- Due to differences in grieving styles, one partner may feel that the other did not care as much or is not grieving the death of your child.
- Partners may look for meaning of the loss in their way. One may turn to faith, while the other may turn to something else.
- This is a difficult time for both of you. Remember, if your relationship was secure prior to your loss it can become a deeper relationship during this journey towards healing
- Your feelings of sadness are in part due to all the broken hopes and dreams. Each of you may have had different dreams for this special child. Sharing your dreams may give you some insights into the feelings of the other
- It is OK to begin enjoying life after the death of a child. Your child would not want you to be sad the rest of your life. Sharing laughter and tears together helps each of you to heal.

Tips to Remember:

- When a child dies, grief affects the couple at the same time. Unlike other life's stresses which do not always effect partners at the same time. Therefore, your closest support is not always able to respond to you because they are dealing with their own grief.
- Difficulties arise in the best of marriages/relationships. Keep talking to each other honestly about your needs and feelings.
- After a loss, stress is also placed on your sexual relationship. Talk about your feelings openly. Remember that the human touch, i.e. hugging, holding, cuddling, etc. can be healing during this time
- Everyone also needs “private time” from time to time, especially during the grieving process to deal with private feelings and thoughts, and to reflect. Respect the need for privacy when your partner needs it and allow them the needed time and space.



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How can we work together in order to get through this?

- Each of you may have different ideas about what to do with the child's belongings. Talk about any differences that exist, and try to compromise if you are able to do so.
- Seek out support (i.e. support/self-help groups, clergy, or professional counselors)
- Spend time together as a couple, and alone as needed
- Set a time aside to talk to each other every day – very often it is difficult to talk about the way you are feeling.
- Pray together, if that is your belief and it is comforting to both of you
- Give yourselves, and each other, time to adjust to the loss
- Your spouse / significant other does not have to be your only support.
- Consider remembering the child with a new ritual – a way of saying “good-bye” while bringing you both comfort.
 - ✦ Planting a living memorial i.e. a tree, bush, or flower garden
 - ✦ Burning a candle at special time i.e. at mealtime.

How can we take care of our relationship and each other?

- Treat yourselves to a night out once in a while
- Take walks together
- Give each other back rubs
- Write love notes to each other
- Talk to each other about the feelings you have – and be accepting of their attitude.

Remember –

Although you have lost a child

– You still have each other – and can share many special memories