
Support for grandparents

The death of a grandchild can feel overwhelming

As well as grieving as a grandparent, you are also the parent of your own child who you have been unable to protect from experiencing the pain and desolation of bereavement as they mourn the death of their child.

This can be a double burden.

The intensity of your grief may be affected by how close the relationship was with your grandchild and their parents.

Following the initial shock some of the physical things you might be experiencing may be 'foggy brain' - inability to follow thoughts through, increase or decrease in appetite, tiredness and depleted energy levels, feelings of anxiety and depression.

Your grief may come in waves with no predictability or pattern.

Some grandparents may suffer feelings of guilt that they have outlived someone so much younger.

You may be mourning intensely yet feel others may not recognise how much you are grieving and need to talk about your pain.

Irrational anger may be experienced; it may be directed at life, a deity, or any individual person or authority you feel may be responsible for the death of your grandchild.

Anger is a very powerful emotion and needs to be expressed safely, perhaps through physical activity such as gardening, exercising, or smashing ice on concrete. You may try journaling.

The way your own child expresses their own grief may be different to yours and should be respected. It *won't* help to tell them what they should be feeling, thinking or doing. It *will* help them if you can listen with empathy to them when they express their anger, anguish and despair.

It may help to offer to do some extra things around your own child's house like cooking, gardening, cleaning; school runs etc. to relieve some of the day to day pressures.

If there are surviving grandchildren in the bereaved family you may be able to provide them with much needed comfort, support and stability, especially early on when the normal patterns of family life may be so disrupted, and mum and dad may be so deeply in their own grief they have little energy themselves.

Any surviving siblings may be feeling quite lost and afraid. Talking to them in a simple and honest manner is the best way to support them.

If grandparents live a long way away you can provide comfort and support through phone calls, email, letters and cards. It is important that other grandchildren feel loved, special and valued. Grandparents can have your own unique way of showing this.

At the same time it is important to be aware of not over-tiring yourself. You need to manage your own grief and find ways to replenish your own energy.

If the relationship between yourself and your own child has been difficult, it may not be easy to speak about your thoughts and feelings. Talking with a close friend or counsellor might be an option.

You may find comfort in reaching out to other bereaved grandparents either individually or through a support group.

And remind yourself even though your precious grandchild has died, you will always be their grandparent. That will never stop. And your love for them will last forever.