

The news that a baby has died is devastating and a grandparent's grief can be a complicated journey.

On the one hand, you are grieving the death of your grandchild. You may have thought about the first time you were going to hold your grandchild, or the special outfit you were going to buy, or those special times you were going to spend with him or her. You might feel cheated or angry that you no longer have those times to look forward to. On the other hand, you lost a part of your daughter or son. You may feel a sense of helplessness—unable to prevent the anguish their own child feels.

The death of a baby can make life seem more fragile and unfair than ever. The dynamics of your family may undergo a change, especially if your other children or extended family members are having babies. Feeling torn and unable to know how to best support everyone is quite common.

### What to expect...

In the coming weeks and months you may feel...

**Shock**—It is difficult to process the death of a baby. You may feel emotionally numb.

**Denial**—You may talk as if the baby is still alive or continue making plans as if the baby were coming home.

**Confusion**—You may be asking, “Why did this have to happen to my grandchild?” or “Why does my child have to suffer the loss of their own child?”

**Loss of Control**—The emotions you experience may change quickly or surprise you. And, even though you are a parent too, unfortunately you cannot take away the pain of your own child.

**Disappointment**—You too were expecting a healthy baby to hold. The loss of your grandchild can be heartbreaking because you lost your future together.

**Jealousy**—It may be difficult to be around other babies at first. You too longed for a healthy pregnancy and baby.

**Anger**—You may be angry at the situation, your child, grandchild, spouse, God, etc.

**Guilt**—You might feel that there was something you could have done that you did not. Or, you may question why your grandchild had to die while you continue living.

**Sadness & Depression**—Expressing your sorrow is normal. If you try to suppress your emotions, your sadness may become overwhelming.

Although these are the most common responses, it is unlikely that you will experience your emotions in a particular order or in the same way as others in the family. Feelings often ebb and flow and there is no *right* or *wrong* way to grieve. Remember the most intense feelings do not last forever; there *will* come a time when your heartache lessens and healing does take place. Incorporating your loss into your daily life takes patience and time.

If you personally experienced a pregnancy or infant loss years ago, be aware that the death of a grandchild can possibly bring your long-buried feelings to the surface. If this happens, it may come as a surprise, but it is not uncommon. This can affect you in different ways: You may be especially sensitive and caring, or you may feel as if you should tell your child, “I survived this, you will too.” You may also wonder why they receive support that you did not. It is important to work through those emotions and memories with a trusted friend, other loved one or a professional.

### Caring for yourself...

When you are grieving it is important to take care of yourself both physically and emotionally. You may experience physical symptoms such as mood swings, fatigue, insomnia, inability to concentrate, or irritability. Your energy levels can be erratic, as well as your appetite.

### In the days ahead...

**What To Say**—If you can't find the right words, say, “I'm sorry,” or “I just do not know what to say.” Avoid clichés such as “Everything happens for a reason,” or “Thank goodness you are young, you can still have more children,” or, “God would never give you more than you could handle.” What may seem comforting to you may feel very hurtful to the parents. Clichés tend to minimize the loss and the emotions a parent has toward the baby. If you do say something insensitive, acknowledge it and apologize. Sometimes there is just nothing to say. Be with them, hold their hand, or give them a hug.

**Check Up**—At first, offering to run errands, provide food, or do laundry may be helpful. After parents get settled at home, continue to call and check in on the family. Be specific with how you would like to help. After a few weeks, people generally stop coming by. Parents need a reminder that they are not alone. Make a call, leave a message, or write a note to let them know you care.



**How to Acknowledge the Baby**—One misconception is that the shorter the baby's life, the easier the grief process. This is just not true. Regardless of how old the baby was or how far into the pregnancy the loss occurred, chances are the parents had hopes and dreams for their future together. It is important to talk about the baby using his or her name. This is sometimes avoided, but many parents love to hear others speak their baby's name.

**Avoid Giving Advice**—There are no rules that define how one should feel or how soon one will return to the norms of daily life. Giving parents permission to grieve in their own way can be healing. Parents need a safe person and/or place to talk about their baby and the feelings they are experiencing. They need to be heard without feeling judgment or receiving unwanted advice.

**Parents Need Time**—It is very difficult to watch your own child grieve, and after some time you may wonder why they have not gotten better. The parents of a baby who has died will need more time to grieve than society allows. The average intense grief period is 18 to 24 months and parents will go through ups and downs during that time.

**Remember Special Dates**—Parents, and grandparents, may be saddened by special events or dates (birthdays, due date, delivery date, Mother's & Father's Day, holidays) because it is a reminder their baby is not here. Acknowledge how difficult these days may be without the baby, and ask how they are doing. Showing your recognition with cards, gifts, or remembrances also helps to create special memories; many parents find a great deal of comfort in knowing that you love and miss their baby, too.

## Talking to your friends...

You too have probably shared with others the excitement of a new grandchild. When friends ask, "When do I get to see that grandbaby of yours?" or "How is the grandbaby doing?" it can be difficult to find the right response. Regardless of the welling emotion that may occur when talking about your grandchild, it is important to be honest. Some people may not respond well to hearing that a baby has died, while others may be empathetic to the situation or even share a similar tragedy in their own lives. Regardless of how

others respond, you have validated your grandchild's life by sharing his or her story. When talking to others you may actually find other grandparents that have lost a grandchild. Finding someone to share and confide in can be helpful to your own healing.

## Making memories...

- Save dried flowers and ribbons to create items such as potpourri, ornaments, decorations, etc.
- Jewelry that includes the birthstone of your grandchild or a special charm
- A shrub, tree, or flowers as a growing memorial
- Special pictures or picture frames
- A quilt or blanket
- Holiday ornaments
- Donations made to your favorite organizations or a hospital in memory of your grandchild
- Create special rituals such as remembrances during holidays, gravesite traditions, etc.
- Find an Angel of Hope or other monument near you and have a brick engraved with your grandchild's name

## Talking about the future...

Allow your son or daughter to share with you their thoughts on future pregnancies or children without pressure or prodding. Grief is a long journey, and having more children will not ease the grief or replace the special baby that died. Even though you may have good intentions, encouraging or implying that parents should have more children may make parents feel as though you are minimizing their loss. They won't 'feel better' by having more children. When the time is right, your son or daughter might tell you the good news that you will have another grandchild. It might be exciting or it might remind you of the grandchild you lost. Either way it is acceptable to share your emotions, but even more importantly, to remember and honor your grandchild that died.



## Grandparent's Grief

*A brief reference for those whose grandchild died during pregnancy or in the first few months of life*