



Grandparents & Grief

The death of an infant is a tragedy that affects not only the parents, but also the grandparents. Grandparents grieve just as deeply, but often set their own feelings aside in order to provide support for their grieving children. The sudden and unexpected death of a baby can leave grandparents with feelings of shock, disbelief, denial and anger. They may even express wishes that they had died instead of the infant as the death of a baby defies the natural order of life. Many grandparents report feelings of guilt for living a full life compared to the shortened life of their grandchild.

Grandparents experience a unique and complex grief when their grandchild dies. You may find that your grief is especially overwhelming and difficult to manage. Your feelings may go unnoticed as other family members focus on supporting the parents of the baby. However, it is often said that grandparents grieve twice. First you grieve the loss your grandchild. You may also grieve for the intense heartbreak your son or daughter is experiencing. You may also feel a sense of inadequacy in providing comfort for your child.

Tips for Coping

Hold Your Grandchild

If you get the opportunity to do so, take the time to see, touch, and hold your grandbaby. Interacting with him or her can help you to feel more connected. Consider rocking, singing, or reading a book to him or her.

Give Yourself Permission to Grieve

Not only has your son or daughter lost their child, but you have also lost a grandchild. It is important to give yourself permission to grieve in whatever way feels right to you. You likely had hopes and dreams for this baby as well. If this is your first grandchild, remember, you are still a grandmother or grandfather.

Take Care of Your Child

Although you are going to want to take care of your son or daughter, you will not be able to “fix” this. Take your cues from them and try not to be offending if your child seems to push you away. Just be a comforting presence or ask him or her what would be helpful for them. When your child is ready to talk, listen and be non-judgmental. Your child will likely grieve differently from you, and that is ok. Ask your child if they would like help researching funeral homes and/or burial sites. It is important not to ask, “what happened” as it implies that someone did something wrong.

Take Care of Yourself

Make sure to take care of your basic needs. Ensure that you are staying hydrated, eating, and getting plenty of rest. You cannot take care of your child if you are not taking care of yourself.

Find a Trusted Confidante

While it is ok to talk with your child about your grandbaby, he or she will be incapable of providing you comfort. Finding a trusted friend or family member to talk to can help you process your emotions and provide comfort. This should be someone you feel comfortable sharing your emotions without feeling judged.

Expect a Rollercoaster

Grief is not linear, even for grandparents. You may alternate through the grief stages multiple times and even revisit a stage you had previously experienced.

Honoring Your Grandchild

There are many ways in which to honor your grandchild such as gardening, crafting, or journaling. Make sure to find ways to acknowledge your grandson or granddaughter on significant days such as Grandparents’ Day, the baby’s birthday, and holidays. Check to see if there are memorial events in your community.

Find a Support Group

Additionally, there are support groups specifically for grandparents who have experienced infant loss that can provide additional resources and a sense of community. While you will likely never “get over” the loss of a grandchild, with the right support, it is possible to begin the healing process.



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