

GRANDPARENT GRIEF

Marked by multiple loss

“A grandparent is someone with silver in their hair and gold in their heart.” —Unknown Author

As we age and our own children move on in life, there is often a wonderful anticipation towards becoming a grandparent. Traditionally, this role implies all the deep love and joy without all the responsibility. Such pleasure of knowing and loving a child, while the primary parenting is up to someone else! There is a special bond between grandparent and grandchild born from the beauty of knowing your memory and life lives on in another. The connection between generations can be defined by many things; love, conflict, loyalty, warmth and concern to name just a few. No matter how the relationship is defined, the connection is constant and heartfelt.

What happens to that bond when a grandchild dies? Often grandparents experience a profound sense of pain, confusion and anguish. The sense of loss becomes double fold. They deeply miss the child and also grieve for their own child who is suffering so much. A sense of helplessness can be pervasive. How can this be? How can I outlive my own grandchild? How can I possibly help? How can I express my own grief when my own child is hurting?

This tragic event may be experienced as a secondary grief, or worse, an unrecognized grief. Grandparents may often feel very alone in their sorrow. This sense of helplessness and isolation can quickly lead to depression. Here are some ways to help yourself and your child.

- Recognize your experience of grief has validity, too. Anytime you love and the connection is severed by death, there is pain. The process is both universal and unique. Take care of yourself both physically and emotionally.
- Honor your own grief and feelings of loss; allow yourself to feel. Find your own supports, people who will listen and be there for you.
- Stay involved. Offer to help with siblings; they are grieving, too, and need added attention. Meals need cooking and houses need cleaning; helping your children with their responsibilities can give you a sense of purpose.
- Be there to support your child. You can imagine and are witness to the pain like no one else. Remember the best support is truly listening; no one has answers at this difficult time.
- Recognize that your child may not know what they want or need from you. Your patience, love and understanding can provide the support they need.



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Being a grandparent should be marked by love and joy; a time to give back to the next generation, dispense wisdom and hugs in equal measure and share your life story for those who will listen. When the death of a child shatters those dreams, it is profoundly painful. It breaks the natural code of life. Remember finding your own path towards healing and honoring the multiple losses you feel is an important process.

—*C. Caryn Kondo, MSW*



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