



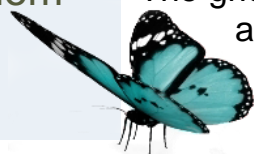
Grief of a GRANDPARENT

A multi-layered blow



The relationship between a grandparent and a grandchild is very special and unique. When a grandchild dies, the grief associated with the loss is often so intense and painful, it leaves bereaved grandparents feeling hopeless as they experience what many refer to as a double loss.

Not only do they mourn for their grandchild, they may also feel a sense of helplessness because they are unable to take away the pain felt by the parents of their grandchild, one of whom is their own child.



“When a grandchild dies, grandparents *grieve twice*. They mourn the loss of the child, and they feel the pain of their own child’s suffering.”

Grandparent’s Grief Is Unique

When a grandchild dies, the grandparent often mourns the death on many levels. The grandparent probably loved the child dearly and may have been very close to him or her. The death has created a hole in the grandparent’s life that cannot be filled by anyone else. Grandparents who were not close to the child who died, perhaps because they lived far away, may instead mourn the loss of a relationship they never had.

Grieving grandparents are also faced with witnessing their child—the parent of the child who died—mourn the death. A parent’s love for a child is perhaps the strongest of all human bonds. For the parents of the child who died, the pain of grief may seem intolerable. For the grandparents, watching their own child suffer and feeling powerless to take away the hurt can feel almost as intolerable.

Emotional Aspects of Grief

The grief journey has many emotional peaks and valleys and lasts far longer than society in general recognizes. Grandparents may initially experience overwhelming feelings of denial, shock and



numbness. In time, the shock will wear off and other emotions such as anger, guilt and regret may surface.

The death of a grandchild isn't something a grandparent ever expected to experience; they expected their grandchild to outlive them. Many grandparents say "I wish it had been me who died instead of my grandchild". There are times when the emotional rollercoaster of grief can be very confusing as bereaved grandparents experience a variety of intense emotions which may vary from one moment to the next. Grief is also unpredictable; it can revive old, forgotten pains, such as a miscarriage or the death of a parent. This is normal. The bereaved should honour these feelings as part of the process.

Numbness and Shock

There are many facets of grief, but no certain order in which they will be experienced. When a grandchild dies, most grandparents feel a protective numbness or shock. Even though they may know their grandchild has died, their minds may want to deny it and the numbness allows this. They may find themselves talking to and about the grandchild as if he or she were still alive. They may "see" the child somewhere, only to realize it is someone else.

Trauma

As the numbness lessens, the pain and frustration a bereaved grandparent experiences may become more intense. It has been said that grief truly begins when the shock has worn off. As grandparents begin to fully feel the extent of their pain, they may feel overwhelmed with sadness, anger, guilt, regret and questions of why. It can be helpful to seek the support of others who have experienced a similar loss who can provide a

safe place to share feelings and offer encouragement.

Anger

Not everybody experiences anger as part of their grief journey, but many do. Anger may be directed inward or outward toward others. Anger may be focused at God, the spouse, the child or even the grandchild who has died. It is not uncommon for a bereaved grandparent to have anger at themselves for not being able to prevent the death which has devastated the family. While anger is often associated with being a negative aspect of grief, it can also be used constructively. Anger over injustices and diseases, for example, have led those in grief to turn their anger into action toward raising money, funding scholarships, changing laws and making the world a better place in honour of their loved ones who died.

Depression

Some depression is a normal part of the grieving process, yet it may feel so overwhelming to bereaved grandparents that they fear they are going crazy. Bereaved grandparents may also experience additional stress concerning the emotional and mental wellbeing of their own child who is grieving. If the depression does not appear to lessen over time, you may want to talk with a qualified professional who can determine how best to help you.

Grief and the Family

Because each person's grief journey is unique, many bereaved grandparents find they are grieving much differently than their spouse and other family members. Grief can affect the family dynamic, as everyone processes their grief at different speeds and

and in different ways. Each grandparent had their own relationship with their grandchild and will likely have their own way of grieving as well, which may create added stress within the family relationships. There is no right or wrong way to grieve and there are no timetables. Communication, understanding and patience with one another are critical while on the grief journey.

Grief is Hard Work

Grief is hard work and it requires a lot of energy and a commitment to survival to successfully navigate this journey. This can be difficult for bereaved grandparents who may have little energy to give as they face the full magnitude of their loss. Most grief professionals recommend that bereaved individuals work on their grief at their own pace trying to achieve small goals, especially early in their grief. We live in a technological age where there are many resources for support and grief education available. Education and support are key components in learning about and processing grief. By taking small steps on a regular basis to seek support, sharing living memories and gaining insight and education into the grieving process, bereaved grandparents can begin to find hope.



Grandparents ask *“How can I help my own child?”*

Even as you grieve your grandchild’s death, you may also have to care for your child, the parent, as they grieve the loss. This is called a “double grief” because you are grieving for your child, and for the loss of your grandchild. Supporting your own child while sorting out your feelings of grief can be overwhelming. You feel powerless and wish you could take your child’s pain away. The following are suggestions that might comfort your child:

- Allow your adult child to cry and grieve the way they need to.
- When you say, “I am here for you,” then truly be there and accept what they ask of you.
- Offer practical help, like grocery shopping, cooking dinner, or babysitting other grandchildren.
- Avoid common phrases like, “They are in a better place,” or “At least, you have other children,” and “It’s going to be okay.”
- Do not take expressions of anger or frustration personally. These are expressions of the pain of grief, and it is nothing against you.
- Allow for space between you and your adult child. Sometimes, your expression of grief can feel unbearable to manage alongside their own grief.

Love Remains

Grief is the price we pay for love; love doesn't die when a grandchild dies. Because love remains, the work put forth to process grief will eventually lead to a life no longer solely focused on the death but rather a life filled with good memories and shared joy about the grandchild.



Many bereaved grandparents have found hope and support through The Compassionate Friends. (204) 727-1823

And the following books may be helpful:

- **Grandparents Cry Twice: Help for Bereaved Grandparents**, by Mary Lou Reed, Baywood Publishing, 2000.
- **When a Grandchild Dies: What to Do, What to Say, How to Cope**, by Nadine Galinsky Feldman, CreateSpace, 2015.
- **Forgotten Tears: A Grandmother's Journey through Grief**, by Nina Bennett, Booklocker.com, 2005.
- **Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart**, by Alan Wolfelt, Companion Press, 2004.



For more information on our Grief Services, please visit our website at www.brockiedonovan.com or call (204) 727-0694