
MARRIAGE AFTER DEATH OF A CHILD

Don't expect your spouse to be a tower of strength when he or she is also experiencing grief. Be sensitive to your spouse's personality style. In general, he or she will approach grief with the same personality habits used in approaching life. It may be very private, very open and sharing, or somewhere in between.

- ✓ Find a sympathetic friend, someone who cares and will listen without judgment or interruption.
- ✓ Do talk about your child with your spouse. If necessary, set a daily or weekly time for this.
- ✓ Seek the help of a counselor if grief or problems in your marriage are getting out of hand.
- ✓ Do not overlook or ignore anger-causing situations. It's like adding fuel to a fire—eventually there will be an explosion. Deal with things as they occur.
- ✓ Remember, you loved your spouse enough to marry. Try to keep your marriage alive by having dates or time alone together to create new memories.
- ✓ Join a support group for bereaved parents. If you are unable to attend as a couple, come by yourself or with a friend. It is a good place to learn about grief and to feel understood. Do not pressure your spouse to attend with you if it is not to his or her preference.
- ✓ Join a mutually agreeable community-betterment project as common ground between you.
- ✓ Be gentle with yourself and your mate. Have grace.

REMEMBER

Men and women are wired differently. You won't react to the loss the same way. Don't try to understand one another's way of coping, just honor it.

- ✓ Do not blame yourself or your mate for what you were powerless to prevent. If you blame your spouse or personally feel responsible for your child's death, seek counseling for yourself and your marriage.
- ✓ Realize that you are not alone. There are many bereaved parents who survived loss of a child.
- ✓ Choose to believe that one day your heart will again know the joys of life.
- ✓ Recognize your extreme sensitivity and vulnerability, and be alert to the tendency to take things personally.
- ✓ Read about grief, especially the books written for bereaved parents.
- ✓ Take your time with decisions about your child's things, change of residence, etc.
- ✓ Be aware of unrealistic expectations for yourself or your mate.

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- ✓ Remember, there is no timetable. Everyone goes through grief differently, even parents of the same child.
 - ✓ Try to remember that your spouse is doing the best he or she can.
 - ✓ Marital friction is normal in any marriage. Don't blow it out of proportion.
 - ✓ Try not to let little everyday irritants become major issues. Talk about them and try to be patient.
 - ✓ Be sensitive to the needs and wishes of your spouse as well as yourself. Sometimes it is important to compromise.
 - ✓ It is very important to keep the lines of communication open.
 - ✓ Work on your grief instead of wishing that your spouse would handle his or her grief differently. You will find that you will have enough just handling your own grief. Remember, when you help yourself cope with grief, it indirectly helps your spouse.

Value your marriage—you have lost enough.