

Do I ever stop being a bereaved parent?

By: David Roberts

I was asked by a friend of mine if we ever stop being bereaved parents. My friend is also a bereaved parent. It was an interesting question, because approximately two years after my daughter Jeannine died, I decided that I didn't want to be a bereaved parent anymore. The daily pain and suffering became too much for me. I wanted my life to be the way it was before Jeannine died. I stopped going to my parental bereavement support group and tried to not think about the pain of losing my precious daughter. I became more miserable as a result of my conscious decision to stop being bereaved.

I decided to ask my support group facilitator for help. After a few sessions with her, she helped me realize that I needed to embrace my identity as a bereaved parent in order for me to adjust to the physical absence of Jeannine. Embracing my identity as a bereaved parent means doing things to find meaning and joy amidst the sadness of my loss, while being of service to others. Here are some of the things that have helped me find joy and meaning following Jeannine's death.

- Listening to others stories – I am honored and humbled when bereaved parents shares their stories of their deceased child's life and death because it is one of the most intimate events that is shared between two people. I identify with their pain, but I also feel joy when some wonderful memories of their loved ones are shared.
- Making a conscious effort to brighten up someone's day – This can be anything from holding a door open for another person to sending a note or an e-mail to let someone know that you are thinking of them. I supervise six staff at my place of employment, and I make it a point to ask about their personal lives and families at least once a week.
- Writing – For me, this has taken the form of articles on Jeannine's story, to revelations that I have experienced during my grief journey. Writing can also take the form of a personal journal or poetry that bereaved parents feel captures the essence of their children. A bereaved parent recently sent me a book that she made identifying the positive qualities of her son that she wanted to integrate into her own life.
- Learning gratitude for the present moment – Early in my grief, I was angry and bitter because of the cruel injustice of losing a child. Now, almost seven years into my grief, I have learned to have gratitude for those who are with me in the present. The present moment is all that is guaranteed to us. Knowing that my relationship with Jeannine is ongoing has also helped me appreciate the present moment more.

We don't stop being bereaved parents. As we adjust to our new reality, we are able to find joy with and without a connection to our bereaved parent

identities. As long as we are willing to ride the emotional roller coaster that is our grief, we will be able to learn to live once again.