

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADEQUATE SUPPORT FOR THE BEREAVED

By: Dave Roberts



In his book, *The Spiritual Lives of Bereaved Parents*, Dennis Klass, Ph.D., discusses the importance of bereaved parents maintaining connection with their deceased children in communities that support that connection. Our ability as bereaved parents to access and receive support from other parents who understand our pain is critical to us feeling less isolated in our grief. Adequate support also is crucial in helping us adjust to a world without the physical presence of our children.

Soon after my daughter Jeannine died in March of 2003, it was suggested that my wife Cheri (Jeannine's mom) and I go to a bereavement support group sponsored by a local agency. The group met weekly for six consecutive weeks. The group facilitators were very skilled, supportive and had some useful information about the grief process. However, we were the only individuals in the group who experienced the death of a child. The group did not meet our needs because we could not readily identify with the other participants' pain and vice versa.

Eventually, we found another support group that was specifically for bereaved parents. We attended that group for over two years and were supported by the facilitator and other parents to maintain our connection to Jeannine. As a result, we felt less isolated in our grief. We found a community that understood our excruciating pain.

Bereaved individuals do receive support from family or friends, but many times it does not last long beyond the funeral. Many may subscribe to the belief that support, like grief, is time-limited, or that it may prevent the bereaved from resolving their grief.

In reality, the bereaved need ongoing support because of the circularity of their grief and due to the fact that grief journeys are lifelong in many instances. Ongoing support from others is also crucial because of the bereaved's desire to be supported in maintaining ongoing connection to their loved ones.

Many bereaved individuals find support groups to be helpful. Here are some things to keep in mind:

If you are considering going to a bereavement support group (which I'd highly recommend), find a support group that will understand your own unique pain and support your ongoing connection to your loved one.

Go to at least three support group attendance meetings before you decide whether or not the group is a good fit for you. If you feel that the group is not meeting your needs after three sessions, find another one that will be a better fit.

If you can't get to a particular support group meeting because of transportation or other reasons, online bereavement support is available. The Compassionate Friends has online support for families who have been affected by the death of a child. Phone support may also be available as well. Facebook also has a variety of groups that support bereaved individuals and provide a way to connect with other bereaved individuals throughout the country and world.

"A single beam cannot support a great house" - Chinese Proverb