

Grief After The Death Of a Grandchild

Grandparents experience ‘double grief’ when a grandchild dies. In addition to their own grief, grandparents also witness their adult child’s grief journey.

Strategies to Support Healthy Grieving and Mourning (A. Wolfelt, 2014)

- Be okay with saying “no”, when necessary. Be kind to yourself, recognize your own needs and the importance of setting boundaries.
- Find ways to maintain connections with your grandchild. Allow yourself to reflect on your memories, look through pictures, tell stories, and ask others to share their memories of your grandchild with you.
- Talk about your grandchild, speak their name, keep them involved in holidays and special occasions, and plan how you will acknowledge them on the anniversary of their death. This can be through sharing memories, with the understanding that this will evoke both laughter and tears.
- Make use of linking objects – objects that are meaningful to you and bring comfort and connect you to your grandchild. This can be a photo, a stuffed animal or toy, a piece of clothing, making a favourite meal, or listening to a favourite song.
- Grieve as a family. Discuss the differences in your grief, and listen to each other, without judgment. Provide the opportunity and time for each other to openly express thoughts and feelings.

**You’re not alone.
We’re here to listen.**
There is no timeline for grief. Knowing there are supports and resources available can give hope as you move through your grief.

“It is important to remember that pain related to loss is normal and necessary, as life has drastically changed, and you do not have the ability to control every situation.

Instead, support your family by standing alongside them in their grief and reflect on all the love you shared and the things you were able to do with your grandchild.”

(A. Wolfelt)



Grief doesn't occur in stages and does not have a timetable. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, and it can be expected that your grief will impact you emotionally, physically, cognitively, behaviourally, and/or spiritually.

Emotional Responses:

Shock and Numbness naturally occur, as the feelings and pain connected to loss would be too overwhelming to process all at once. It is important to remember that these emotions work "like anesthesia; they help you to survive the pain of early grief" (A. Wolfelt, 2005).

Sadness, Longing, and Yearning for your grandchild may feel like it will last forever. The first step in dealing with the intensity of these feelings is to give yourself permission to acknowledge that they are occurring, allowing yourself to experience these emotions in "doses" instead of attempting to avoid them. Although painful, these emotions are a natural part of grieving, mourning, and healing.

Helplessness and Guilt can occur while you are grieving the loss of your grandchild. As a grandparent, you would have done anything to change what has happened and do anything to take away the pain your child is feeling. "You are trying to make meaning of something tragic and painful. Guilt arises from a vulnerable self-critical point of view and feelings of helplessness in not being able to change things then or now" (Squamish Hospice).

Anger plays a vital role for you at different times in your grief. It is a secondary emotion that provides a sense of control in a world that feels uncontrollable; it is also about protesting what has happened and protesting against injustice. It is important to release your anger in a way that is safe for you and others.

Physical Responses:

Your sleep and appetite may be impacted; you may also feel fatigued, exhausted, experience muscle tension or weakness. Give yourself time to rest, establish a healthy routine for yourself and ask for support, or accept help when it is offered.

Tightness in the throat or chest, headaches or stomach concerns, or shortness of breath may also occur. Although these are typical responses to grief, if you feel that your physical symptoms are a medical concern, it is important that you follow-up with your primary care provider.

Cognitive Responses (Thoughts):

You may find yourself getting lost in your thoughts, you may replay events in your mind, or search for answers in the hopes of making sense of this life-altering loss. You may find yourself searching for other reasons for their absence or may forget momentarily that your grandchild has died; this happens because your mind and emotions are still working to process this loss. Be gentle with yourself; don't fault yourself for feeling confused or having trouble with concentration or memory. Give yourself the time you need.

Behavioural Responses:

Changes in behaviour may also be present, such as withdrawing, reduced self-care, or increased irritability. If you notice this happening, speak openly about how you are feeling (where you are in your grief in that moment) and ask for help. You don't have to grieve on your own.

Spiritual Responses:

Questioning the value and meaning in life and searching to understand why this death occurred, often happens. Thinking about the future may feel unsettling and cause feelings of anxiety. Although it may not feel like it right now, trust that you will be able to navigate through your grief journey, renewing your sense of self at a pace that is comfortable for you.

Doka, K. J. (2016). When a child dies. In *Grief is a Journey: Finding Your Path Through Loss* (pp. 125–149). essay, Atria Books.

Wolfelt, A. (2014). *Healing a Grandparent's Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas After Your Child Dies*. Companion Press.

The Grief of Grandparents. *Compassionate Friends*. (2016). <http://www.compassionatefriends.org/>



We're a part of your story.