



The Compassionate Friends, Queensland Inc.

Grief Support for Bereaved Parents, Grandparents & Siblings

Newsletter (Extracts) Aug - Sep 2010



TCF

The Grief of Fathers

Fathers are cast in a societal role that is different from that of the mother. Although there are many role crossovers and although frequently the deep strength in a family is in the mother, society expects, and fathers themselves expect, that they be the — strong ones.

Generally the father is the major support of the family, and he plans to meet his current expenses, insure against the unanticipated, save for the anticipated family expenses of the future, and establish an education fund and some security for old age and years of declining capability. In effect, as a father plans for his family, he also accepts the responsibility for planning positively for his own death. As he buys a house, real estate, and particularly insurance, he fully accepts the concept that insurance actuarial statistics indicate that his spouse will live five to ten years longer than he, will have her own needs, and may have to meet all child needs without his productive capacity and support.

The role a father assumes is a learned role: he also often emulates his own father; a societally imposed role in almost every contact in life expects him to provide, disburse, save, plan, and guide. For example, it would be a rare insurance agent who approached the mother of a family first and rare father who did not carry some insurance against the anticipated and expected eventuality of his death. In the same sense, he accepts the possibility of early death of his wife. The death of a child is a shocking, unanticipated, dislocating, damaging event which weakens the structure of the family's entire life and makes all of their work and planning a futility of catastrophic proportion. Although father may never have stated or even thought of it deeply, he has already spent a large portion of his own life being a father.

Suddenly, there is NO future for the lost child and NO reason for a great deal of what father has been working for. Our cultural heritage is such, however, that the father is expected to be strong, to comfort his wife, to assist the siblings in reaching an understanding, and to cope with all changes, including the funeral arrangements. Assuming a normal existence prior to the death, he already had a job, a mortgage, some problems, some debt, and felt that he had a load to carry. Suddenly, with little or no warning, he has a terrible additional, emotional load and an additional practical load unwanted, unplanned and emotionally unacceptable to him.

As the responsible family head, the father also feels a responsibility for the child's death, and he asks himself: What did I do wrong? Where did I fail? Why did I not anticipate? What should I have done to prevent the catastrophe? Intellectually we know this is irrational. Emotionally we all seem to do it.

Within weeks, our society expects the father to assimilate his loss, comfort his wife, guide the surviving children, and go back to work with his usual dedicated, efficient ability. Responsible men attempt to do what is expected of them and what they expect of themselves. Still in acute grief, father finds himself shattered: his working capacity is perhaps only 30% of normal, and his confidence destroyed by this event which he could not prevent, but for which he feels responsible. As father departs for work he leaves a distraught family, hoping they can get through the day, and approaches a demanding work situation where he is expected to be productive, capable and sound. With the physical symptoms of

grief, he has all the sensations of somatic distress: sighing, depression, an empty feeling in the pit of his stomach, tension, mental pain, lack of energy, and a great feeling of futility. Any effort seems exhausting to him; he is tired; there is no incentive to normal activity; food is tasteless; any enjoyment of life seems — wrong.

As he attempts to pick up the broken strands of his own and his family's existence, he does so with a sense of unreality, personal failure, self accusation of negligence, and a desire to withdraw from others and distance himself from these very painful and unacceptable circumstances.

If father is able to work halfway efficiently, communicate, project warmth to others, and show interest in the job, he finds the effort exhausting and the result less than satisfactory. He has no patience for the routine and mundane problems of the work day world and feels resentment toward those who cannot see that he is now half a person, faced with great change, little energy, no zest for life, and little or no incentive. Having taxed his energy and patience just to get through the day, he goes home again to the family, knowing they, too, expect much of him. Knowing he has little to give, he can barely hold himself together. The result can be an increasing sense of inability, inadequacy, failure, and guilt. At times he feels that he really cannot cope with all of it. If at this point in time, a friend he trusts will take him to task and force him to think he is fortunate.

Someone needs to remind him that on the day before the death, he was a responsible, caring parent doing the best he knew at the time. If less than perfect, he was only human, and a pretty good human at that — or he would not now be so devastated. As much as he hates to accept the most undesirable change, it has already happened and it is irreversible. The way in which he copes with the changes will have a marked effect on all those lives that touch upon his own. As the responsible family head, the father must now gather the broken structure, accept the great loss as best he can, build where he can and work towards a normality of existence for that family remaining. In effect, if anything so devastating can be put into one coherent paragraph, the father's job is not to hold himself up in great strength, the job he really has is to realize that events beyond his control have struck him down; he has been nearly destroyed and is severely damaged and his remaining family is so shattered that he cannot expect too much help there. If he can realize how down he is, how depressed, how normal it is to feel failure, near insanity, and reduced capability, he has made a long step toward the necessity to pick himself up, keep what remains together as well as he can, and go on, expecting time to provide some relief and some answers.

Life, after the death of a child, must be restructured. That this must be done when one is ineffectively functioning and when few goals are seemingly worth accomplishment, makes it ever so difficult. There is a positive necessity to avoid major decisions and major changes at this time. Judgment and balance are impaired. With severe grief the probability of both physical and mental illness is much higher. A father who realizes the dangers and recognizes the impairment of self is much more able to manage until time provides its relief. By accepting the facts of reduced capability and by establishing smaller goals, a father can obtain the time and strength to be kind to his family and himself. It is not a time to show great strength as a facade. It is a time to accept the damage and recover slowly. A father in grief cannot afford the time and energy to feel — responsible for his child's death; his primary responsibility is to survive and to endure as he slowly restructures the lives which have been severely damaged by events beyond his control.

*By Helen and Dayton Robinson –
TCF, Tuscaloosa – lovingly taken from River Valley Chapter Newsletters, Fort Smith, AR
(Sourced from www.neverlosefaith)*

In Memory of Matthew Edward Lavis

10/6/1981 16/8/2003

Mt Garnet is a diminutive township west of the Atherton Tablelands, gum trees and tall dry grasses create the landscape. Eddie (my husband) spent his childhood here, and over the years shared with our children stories of fishing in Return Creek, attending school in bare feet, patches on shorts and bread and dripping for lunch. He grew up with friends you keep for life, and values that seem to have disappeared over time. We holidayed here regularly while the kids were young and they have memories of adventure in the bush with a shangi and safely walking to the shop to buy bags of mixed lollies.

Our boy Matthew spent most of his holiday on the ride on mower which Pop (Eddie's grandfather) let him use to mow the paddock. Matthew not only mowed the paddock but neighbouring yards the council nature strip anywhere that he could. Technology has by passed Mt Garnet and our kids never seemed to miss TV, Pop would bring out his projector and we sat and watched slides of his prized mangoes, grapes and roses. Amazingly they would eat anything Pop ate, cream cheese that had a thin layer of mould on it, — won't hurt you just scrape it off Pop would say, mince stew with whatever was available in the pantry thrown in, there is no way they would have eaten this for me at home.

Today is 10th June 2010 we are snuggled up in our campervan listening to the myriad of birds Eddie can identify each one by their own distinctive song. Our daughter Christine has just rung from Mackay her children Ava and Matthew chattering away in the background, we talk about how the trip was and how the kids are, I feel sad that we are not all together today, maybe next year we can all come.

In the car we don't say much we have our own thoughts but Eddie holds my hand the whole way, I feel the familiar stinging in the chest, the trembling bottom lip, my eyes burn and my heart hurts, the sadness overwhelming. We arrive at the Mt Garnet cemetery and there is a blanket of frost, you can just make out some of the taller more prominent headstones, two small wallabies hop among the graves then halt to check us out. It is so cold and moisture from the fog drips from the trees, we walk carrying flowers to the small black stone figure sitting with his arms wrapped around his knees sitting at the end of the grave. Christine chose the figurine as it gives a sense of peace and contentment. We bend down and kiss the photo of a beautiful young man our son Matthew.

Happy 29th Birthday Matthew.

Submitted by Ann Lavis TCF Mackay, in memory of her precious son Matthew.

Tips for Fathers who are Grieving Their Children

Be kind to yourself. Many fathers may feel anger, sadness, guilt and a host of other emotions because their child died before them. These emotions may seem foreign but are very common with grief—don't try to avoid them.

Reach out for support; it is not a sign of weakness but a sign of courage. Boys are taught to "shake it off" and "take it like a man." It is unrealistic and mistaken that grief can be "shaken off" or avoided.

Allow time to grieve and express your emotions in a healthy way. Finding balance is key to healing.

Be patient with yourself. Talk openly with family and friends about your child and encourage them to talk openly with you too - hearing your child's name mentioned can be helpful.

Create your own memorial. Whether it involves planting, writing, building or painting, be creative and put your energy into doing something in memory of your child.

Sourced from the Good Grief Center For Bereavement Support website

I Believe

By Jennifer Janiszewski, www.bereavement-poems-articles.com

There is nothing I can do, to make him come back
There are no words I can say, that can replace the words you long to hear

There are no answers I can give, that will satisfy your questions
There is not another soul I can introduce you to that will ever replace his
And, there is no love I can offer that will ever replace the love you shared

I can not promise your broken heart will ever be complete
I will not say it could have been worse
I will not deny it was a tragedy
I will not lie and tell you he will come back
He never really left

I do promise he hears you when you speak
I will say he loves you no matter the distance
I will not deny he is in a better place
And, I will not lie; he is waiting to greet you someday

He is every step you take
He is in everything you do
He is the air you breathe
He is every beat of your heart
" He is like the wind.
You cannot see him...but you will always feel him"

*Submitted by TCF Qld, on behalf of Loryse Elford, in memory of her precious son
David John Elford - 29.7.79—25.8.09*

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