



Try to remember

When a child dies, an 'eternal flame' burns to his/her memory. You need to share stories about the child. Talk about your crushed dreams and hopes. Display photographs. Encourage children to express their feelings. Communicate your desire to talk to relatives, neighbours, friends. Often they feel so helpless they don't know what to say or do. Teach them how to help you. If you choose the road of avoidance and escape from hurt, eventually you'll pay the price. You can't extinguish this eternal flame. It needs to burn in tribute to you and your child.

Be comforted by good memories

When a child dies, parents and siblings may be haunted by regrets and painful memories. Share your feelings of guilt and failure, but also realise that no-one is a perfect parent, brother or sister. Accept the fact that, all things considered, with no rehearsal for what you went through, you probably did the best you could. Take plenty of time to focus on the good memories. Tell 'remember when...' stories. Laugh, cry, celebrate what you received from your child. At first this will be painful because there is a big gap in your life and a significant change in the meaning of home. But, ultimately, sharing good memories soothes and heals.

Give your faith the opportunity to grow.

Church/synagogue support, prayer, God's grace can be an important help for people with a religious background.

Assume that what you feel and how you act is normal.

The sooner you meet other bereaved parents and siblings, the quicker you will recognise that your feelings and behaviour are quite normal. You are not weird or strange or losing your mind. Beware of torturing yourself with negative feelings and attitudes. You are weak, helpless, powerless, confused and out of control—but you are normal. Don't feel guilty if you have a good day.

Be sensitive to the fact that people grieve differently.

At a support group meeting, one young mother shared concern about her eleven year old daughter's failure to grieve after the death of her five year old brother. Gradually, the mother realised her daughter had been grieving. However, she had missed her daughter's communication of grief, because she expected her daughter to grieve the same way as she did. The mother was more of a 'feeling' type of person who needed to talk. Her daughter was more of a 'thinking' type of person who did a lot of reflecting before she talked. When she spoke she summed up her thinking in one or two sentences. This was extremely frustrating to her mother, until she realised that her daughter's grief was different.

Why did it happen?

For some people, healing comes through protesting why God (or life) could do something so unfair, so senseless, so meaningless. It is best to encourage such people to rage, to ask why. They are the victims of a great tragedy.

Share with those who have been there.

Although a family may receive tremendous support from their minister, church, doctor, relatives, neighbours, school, this support is not enough. There is an overwhelming desire to talk to other bereaved parents. People who haven't been there really don't understand. They cannot imagine what it's like. No matter how caring they are, they're limited in the help they can provide. Only parents and siblings who've been there can help in this part of the healing process.

Take time for yourself and use time effectively.

How you choose to use time is crucial.

Even though you may feel guilty or may need to adjust your plans, it is all right to try to enjoy yourself in the midst of grief. Going out to dinner, taking a holiday, taking up sport—you need moments of exercise, fun, diversion in order to renew yourself for the many depressing times when you miss your loved one so much.

Try to do something different.

Take a job—it could be voluntary work. Keep a diary—write down exactly how you feel every day. Later you will read what you have written and realise just how much progress you have made. Join a class—learn something new. Try not to spend too much time on your own at home.