

## HELPING PEOPLE THROUGH GRIEF 1

### Handout 1

#### FOR PARENTS OF HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

1. Realize that you will mourn the loss of your child's potential depending on the severity and nature of the baby's handicap. Your projections of your baby's future will be tinged with sadness.
2. Be aware that you and your spouse will mourn separately and differently.
3. Avoid assigning the blame for the defect on your spouse or yourself.
4. Be honest. Tell others how you feel and what you fear. Don't mask your feelings and pretend "everything is fine".
5. Don't shut yourself off from others – they will have no way of knowing your needs or what is happening.
6. Don't confine yourself to the home. Stay in touch with friends. Outings are essential.
7. Don't allow limited thinking or labels to impose limits on your child's potential. Your baby is a child of God and needs your love.
8. Read & learn as much as possible about the nature of your child's problem. Early intervention is essential to maximize potential abilities
9. Join a parent support group if available
10. Remember God has promised to be with you in the days and years ahead. Your faith can be a vital source of spiritual strength and an encouragement to others

#### ADVICE TO CAREGIVERS, FAMILY & FRIENDS

1. Acknowledge the baby's birth with a card or gift the same as you would any baby. Do NOT send a sympathy card. Phone them or write on the card that you are remembering them and their baby in your prayers.

2. Don't say "Isn't this wonderful! God has chosen you as a special parent." Parents do appreciate being told what a good job they are doing caring for the child.
3. Offer practical assistance. Medical care may necessitate a parent being away; offer to help by doing small jobs; caring for siblings, taking children to school, bring food. Parents dislike having to ask for help over & over, but they may need gas money, a rider to accompany them on doctor visits or therapy sessions, a place to stay while out of town during hospitalizations
4. Ask the usual questions you would ask about a newborn baby; "does he/she sleep well? How are you feeling? Do you get enough rest?"
5. Don't ask questions that will induce more guilt. Don't ask the mother her age (risk of birth defects are greater for certain ages). A mother may hear your question as an accusation.
6. Don't make projections about the child's potential. (like saying, "Some of these children end up very bright.")
7. Avoid comparisons. Each child and his problems are unique.
8. Don't expect the parents to plan the whole life of the baby; we don't do that for normal children.
9. Don't always try to be cheery or make them laugh; cry with them if needed. Rejoice with them in their high moments. The valleys are often very low and the highs very high and they want to share those as well.
10. Don't avoid them. Visit; make a brief phone call and be there if they need you. Don't be afraid to discuss the baby's condition if they want to talk about it. Be supportive without intruding upon their way of dealing with their feelings. Just show that you care.
11. Look at and hold the baby. This says, "This handicap is not a barrier; I accept your child."
12. Don't tell the parents that everybody will accept their child. They won't; many people have difficulties accepting those with disabilities.

13. Don't tell the parents what they are feeling/doing is wrong. You don't know the reasons behind their feelings and actions.
14. Don't second-guess God's will for their baby. Also do not interpret what happened to their baby as punishment. We don't know God's will if He hasn't revealed it to us.
15. As the baby develops, rejoice with the parents over even small improvements, successes, & victories. Also, don't be afraid to share your own child's accomplishments. Parents don't want to be shut out of the lives of their friends.
16. As the baby grows, treat the child with respect and love. Do not convey remorse or pity because of the disability.
17. Offer to care for the child so the parents can have some time away for themselves.
18. Remember that disabled children have much to teach us about caring and coping and faith.

## Handout 2 FOR PARENTS WHO HAVE LOST A CHILD

A father is going to handle the baby's death differently than the mother.

Men have been conditioned to put on a front that says, "You've got to be strong for your wife."

Realistically men don't get much emotional support and they get back into society faster because of their job.

This often adds to the stress if the father feels the mother's grief shouldn't be lasting so long

and will often urge her to get over it and get on with life.

Relatives & loved ones may not realize the extent of the grief that occurs in the loss of a child.

They were not involved in the dreams, wishes, & love that develop in the prenatal months.

Remember, grandparents grieve too.

People say things to console themselves.

There is no need to try to say things to make the grieving parent feel better because there is not a

thing you can say or do that will make the parent feel better.

Often the grieving feel isolated and when friends & family withdraw from them because of their own discomfort

it sometimes seems like an accusation that the parents were somehow at fault.

## Handout 2

### FOR PARENTS WHO HAVE LOST A CHILD

#### ADVICE TO OFFER PARENTS

1. Create memories. Hold, rock, photograph, take as much time with your baby as you need so you have a good mental pictures of your baby. Allow yourself the opportunity to convey your feelings to the baby. Anything you can do to create memories is important.
2. Remember, no one is to blame. There is nothing you or your spouse did to cause the death. Feeling of guilt are a given, wondering what was done to cause the death. Guilt is a normal part of grieving as much as anger, fear, sadness, and depression.
3. Make your own decisions; it is vital to the grieving process and will minimize regrets later.
4. Include the mother in funeral planning. Funerals are a formal way of saying “Goodbye.” If the mother remains hospitalized, consider have the /a service in the mother’s hospital room.
5. Keep the lines of communication open. Cards as they arrive can be shared to encourage mutual sharing and mourning.
6. Find a confidant other than your spouse if needed; you need a friend who can allow you to ventilate, cry, and express all your bottled up emotions without denial and rejection.
7. Don’t expect yourself to function as if nothing has happened. The inability to concentrate and feeling as if your world has fallen apart are normal reactions.
8. Don’t try to rush yourselves. Experts say most people take 18-24 months to work through the mourning process (grieving will last a lifetime).
9. If your friends don’t call you, call them and let them know you miss them. Talking openly about what you are experiencing will put them at ease.

10. Remember, your other children mourn the loss of a baby as well. Use death language. Avoid statements like the baby was sick or is sleeping. The child may become fearful of being sick or going to sleep.

#### ADVICE TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS

1. Send cards or briefly worded letters saying in some way, “I am so sorry. I know this is painful for you.” There are no right words that will make them feel better. They just need to know you care & you hurt too.
2. Acknowledge the extent of the loss and the depth of their grief. It has nothing to do with the age or the lost child. Don’t act like nothing happened – this will create a barrier between you. Remember, a sympathizing tear or a squeeze of the hand also brings comfort and acknowledges the loss.
3. Don’t be afraid to mention the baby’s name. This is usually appreciated and acknowledges the one they lost.
4. Avoid asking the parents questions that induce guilt or affix blame. In fact, reinforce the belief that they are not to blame (“I know there’s nothing you did to cause your baby’s death).
5. Tell them you support them and will remember them in your prayers.
6. Avoid trying to say something that will make them feel better, especially clichés. Also don’t offer advice like “be strong; don’t cry.”
7. Avoid interpreting this as God’s plan, God’s will, or God’s punishment. Usually comments such as this are resented, they are poor theology, and confirm that you don’t know what you are talking about.
8. Avoid suggesting they can have other babies. This baby is not replaceable and you devalue the life and their loss.
9. Don’t preach or scold if you think your friend/loved one is wallowing in self-pity. Give them permission to grieve and listen non-judgmentally. Allow them to be angry or tearful in your presence.
10. Don’t avoid the grieving parents. They are still your family/friends. Call them and let them know you are thinking about them. Don’t change the subject if they want to talk about their baby. Listen with all your heart. Grieving is a social process.

11. Call and ask before visiting and bringing your children, but do call and visit.
12. Call the parents or send cards on the anniversaries; baby's birthday, date of death – especially the “firsts” like Mother's Day and Father's day.

Hurtful remarks: *You should be glad he died, (especially if there was a birth defect)*

*can't you just imagine what life for him would have been if he lived;*

*You can have other babies;*

*You have other children;*

*God wants babies in Heaven;*

*God works in strange ways;*

*God has a plan for you.*

*It's probably a good thing she did die so she wouldn't suffer;*

*Maybe it's a good thing \_\_ died because when she got older, she might have gotten into all kinds of trouble.*

### Handout #3

## ABDUCTION AND MURDER OF A CHILD

### For the Family

1. Generally it takes 18-24 months just to stabilize after the death of a family member. It can take much longer when the death was a violent one. Recognize the length of the mourning process and don't develop unrealistic expectations.
2. Your worst times usually are not at the moment the tragedy takes place because then you are in a state of shock or numbness. The most difficult time is often 4-7 months after the death. Sadly, this may be the time most people expect you to be over the loss.
3. When people ask you how you are doing, don't always say, "Fine." Let some know how terrible you feel.
4. Talk with a trusted friend or with other who have experience a similar loss. These people can really know your pain and understand the nature of the loss and let you know you are not alone.
5. Sometimes the depression you feel is a cover for anger. Learn to find appropriate ways to express your anger. The loss is unjust and unfair and you need to vent these feelings.
6. Take time to lament and experience being a victim. The time is necessary and can be therapeutic.
7. It is all right to cry, to be weak. Don't allow yourself to be put on a pedestal for your strength or your ability to "cope so well."
8. Don't expect too much of yourself. A support group can help you cope with your intense grief
9. Seek family therapy counseling with professionals in grief counseling. Women and men handle anger and grief differently. Siblings also are angry and these feelings can cause tremendous strains on relationships.
10. Do not seek revenge on the perpetrator. Vengeance is God's perhaps at the hand of the law. Don't compound problems and grief for yourself and for others by acting outside the law.

11. Channel your anger into constructive action; work toward changing laws to protect children.
12. Protect your family from the news media. If the news reports are painful, turn them off, but save newspapers, you may need to refer to them later/
13. Refrain from using alcohol or drugs to ease the pain. Alcohol is a depressant and will only cause more depression and other problems.
14. Avoid people that bring more pain. Don't let others make you feel guilty. Try to ignore the hurtful things people may say as they try to help.
15. Forgive yourself. There may be true guilt and there will certainly be false guilt. False guilt is unwarranted and imaginary. It may stem from things other people say that make you feel guilty. Confess all your guilt to God and ask forgiveness. He forgives; you must learn to forgive yourself.
16. Allow yourself to heal before you try to reach out to help other parents. But eventually do reach out; helping others may help you from dwelling on yourself.
17. Seek out person who can serve as symbols of hope and faith to you. Faith in yourself, others, and God can be deepened.
18. Stay in touch with the state's attorney during a trial; you may need to be informed of your rights.

#### ADVICE TO FRIEND, FAMILY, AND CAREGIVERS

1. Reach out to the victim's family. If you are a stranger or casual acquaintance, write a note. If you are a close friend go to them or call. Hug them and let the cry; be present for them and let them know you hurt with them. Don't let your pain keep you away.
2. Don't tell them things like "It's God's will." You don't know that. And they don't need to hear that; it may turn them from God when they need Him the most.

3. Recognize that other people besides the parents are hurting. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, even the perpetrator's family may be hurting. Acknowledge their grief and reach out to them as well if you can.
4. Offer or just do menial tasks that will help them during the shock they are feeling; bring food or helpful items like paper goods, help with the dishes, cleaning, laundry, lawn care. Ask before you launder the victim's clothing, clean their room or put away their belongings; the mother may have strong feelings about doing this herself.
5. If the family tells you how angry they are, tell them they have a right to be angry. Allow them to talk about the victim; don't change the subject – if they bring it up, they need to talk.
6. Recognize their grief will be of a very long duration. Lend emotional support in the months ahead, especially during news reports or a trial. This will be emotionally trying; they need your understanding and continuous support.
7. Don't be critical of the family if there is distraction and laughter. Laughter is a form of release from tension and is therapeutic.
8. Lend your support in passing legislation that strengthens laws to protect children.

## Handout 4

### HELP YOUR CHILD UNDERSTAND DEATH

1. Teach with animals and plants. When a pet dies, a child mourns and is developing the ability to work through grief. This will help your child gain a gradual understanding of human death. Don't replace an animal right away. You can also use the life cycle of plants to teach about death.
2. Be open to a child's questions about death. Don't avoid or change the subject. If you don't know the answer, say, "I don't know. Talk about death without fear or denial. The unknown is what children fear most. It is best to talk naturally about death with a child before it impacts them personally. Read books, take them to a funeral of a casual acquaintance.
3. Give accurate information promptly. There is usually a precise reason for death and children want to know everything. They are endowed with curiosity, equipped with powers of observations, are perceptive to body language, and have a great capacity for discerning details.
4. Be honest. It is important to be truthful about the facts of death as they come up and about the feelings of sorrow from loss. This builds a healthy trusting relationship between children and adults. Avoid cover-up stories; these secrets and mysteries tell the child that there are areas not to be shared with parents.
5. Ask what truth the child is seeking. Begin with where the child is; answer only what they ask. They may not be ready for a lot of information.
6. Avoid judgmental statements and don't moralize. Don't say, "You mustn't say that" or "Don't feel that way." Don't tell the child how he should feel.
7. Use death language & avoid euphemisms. Euphemisms are vague and create confusion. Don't give the impression the deceased is gone on a journey and may be coming back.
8. Don't equate death with sleep or sickness. They need assurance that death is not a long sleep.

9. Differentiate between minor and fatal illnesses. Children learn that other children die, but you need to reassure them that it is only when a child is very sick or has an accident that they die.
10. Explain the terminal illness and tell how the disease will be treated. Share that many diseases have been eliminated and advances are being made, so there is hope.
11. Expose the child to the dying person. It can be helpful, but this must be supported and guided by adults so a child can talk about fears.
12. If the dying person is a parent, reassure the child that he/she will be cared for and not abandoned. If you are the surviving parent reassure them that you are taking care of yourself and probably won't die until you are old, however inform them that everyone will die someday.
13. Give the child the option of attending the funeral and other rituals. Don't force, but do encourage, especially if they are age 5 or older. When they are denied participation they often feel isolated and burdened by unexpressed grief. Viewing the body and seeing the casket left at the cemetery answers some questions the child may have.
14. Understand that humor may serve as a release of tension. Children under the age of 12 have a short span of enduring grief compared to adults and they need distractions and resort to various defenses against grief.
15. Don't say, "God needed her," or "God took her," or "God punished her," or that "it is God's will." God may want him next. When the child feels this threat, in his eyes God may become a hated being of little comfort. Assure you child that God understands our pain and will help us through it.
16. Don't try to stop the grieving process. Give the child permission to grieve. To help prevent future emotional difficulties, encourage the child to talk about his/her grief, fear, anger, guilt & loneliness. Explain that these feelings are appropriate and so is crying. Allowing the child to grieve openly will help him move from hurt to health.
17. Be aware of irrational guilt feelings. Reassure the child that he/she did not cause the death and could not have stopped it. They need to be told that their bad thoughts or anger toward a loved one did not cause that death.

18. Give the child affection. Be nonverbal and open to physically comforting your child.
19. Don't fragment the family or initiate more changes than necessary. Try to maintain the family routine as much as possible to provide security.
20. Be open about your own tears & feelings. Don't act as though nothing happened. Let the child know that you will not always feel this way.
21. Don't use the child as a parent replacement – don't assign to the child the dead parent's role. Don't say "Now you are the man/woman of the house." This is an unfair burden and robs the child of his childhood. It is assigning the child an impossible task.
22. Encourage reminiscing about the deceased. Remembering good times and special things about the person who has died create memories that help the child accept the death.
23. Encourage the child to write a letter or draw pictures. The act of writing letters to the survivor, to God, or to the deceased is a way to heal emotional hurts.