



the grief of parents

Doris Zagdanski BA Dip Ed

The grief of parents is complex and painful. It's hard to bear when it's your own grief and it's hard to watch when it happens to someone you know. Amongst the many reactions, there may be:

- **Guilt** – no matter what the cause of death, many parents blame themselves – they are supposed to protect their child, they are responsible for keeping them safe from harm.
- **Disbelief** – you never expect this could happen to you, it happens on the news, it's always someone else.
- **Anger** - at the unfairness of this. Children shouldn't die before their parents, it violates the natural order of the way the world should work, and it can evoke outrage at the injustice of it all.
- **Questioning** – how could this happen? How could there be a God who allows such things? Did we do enough? Did the medical profession do their best? Should I have noticed something was wrong earlier? Why us? Why our child? The questions are endless.
- **Blame** – because child death often makes no sense to us, we seek to blame someone – ourselves, medical staff, our spouse/partner, the hospital system, your child's peer group, God, the law the list is endless.
- **Regrets** – about the times you argued, growled at our child, were too strict, didn't support their ideas, didn't spend enough time with them, criticised their grades or their hair cut!
- **Longing and emptiness** – as you watch the children of friends grow up and enjoy their lives, when family events highlight the gap where the missing child should be, when your other children achieve milestones that this one won't, when other parents tell you about their children and their achievements.
- **Isolation** – you can feel like you don't fit in anymore – at family functions, social clubs, mother's group and places where you once accompanied your child. Fathers can feel left out of support – friends may be quick to ask how your wife is doing but forget to ask after you.
- **Disappointment or irritation** - at the awkwardness of friends who don't know what to say and think their role is to cheer you up. They feel uncomfortable around you and conversation can become difficult. Some friends avoid all talk of your child and what happened. They think they will upset you and make things worse. Others think they have to say something that will lessen your pain, and they think up compensatory remarks like: *At least you have your other children. God only takes the best. Everything happens for a reason.*
- **Frustration** – at oneself and others. Not being able to think straight, being preoccupied with the loss, being disinterested in others' small talk or complaints about trivial matters, having a 'short fuse', thinking or behaving out of character.
- **Unconditional love mixed with sadness** – your heart is filled with love for your child, but there's no-one to give it to. You can feel a great sense of gratitude for all they meant to you, but they're not here to tell it to. There is no one to hug. You can fear you will forget what they looked like or the sound of their voice. There is a painful realisation that for the rest of your life, you will be "living without", and you will need to adjust your sails – your hopes, plans and dreams to accommodate this reality.

Doris Zagdanski is the Convenor of MyGriefAssist website. She is a leading figure in modern day grief and loss education. She conducts educational seminars for both professional and community audiences. She has written several books in this genre and they are available at www.allaboutgrief.com