

# Grief After the Loss of a Child

A gentle guide for understanding and support

Support for an immeasurable and deeply personal bereavement

The death of a child can challenge a parent's sense of identity, safety, meaning and future. There is no phrase that can make this loss smaller. Grief may remain an enduring part of life while, over time, moments of connection, meaning and living can gradually exist alongside it.

## Understanding this kind of grief

- Parents and family members may grieve differently. Different coping styles do not necessarily mean one person cared more.
- Guilt and 'what if' thoughts can be intense even when you could not have changed what happened.
- Other children in the family may need support while adults are grieving too. Their grief may appear through behaviour, play, anxiety or repeated questions.
- Continuing bonds - speaking the child's name, remembering, creating rituals or keeping meaningful objects
- can be important and healthy.

## A gentle reminder

You do not have to prove that your grief is serious enough to deserve care. Loss is personal. What matters is the impact it has on you.

**Space to Breathe Therapy - Support Hub**  
[www.spacetobreathetherapy.co.uk](http://www.spacetobreathetherapy.co.uk)

## Therapy & support that may help

Therapy is not about taking grief away or making you forget. At its best, it gives you a safe relationship in which the loss can be spoken about, understood and carried with less isolation.

Specialist child-bereavement counselling - seek a practitioner or service experienced in this particular loss.

Person-centred counselling - a space where grief can be expressed without pressure or judgement.

Couples or family therapy - may help family members understand different grieving styles.

Trauma-focused therapy - if there are intrusive memories or trauma symptoms, discuss appropriate options with a suitably qualified clinician.

You do not have to start therapy simply because you are grieving. Some people are supported well by family, friends, community, reading or peer support. Others value professional help. Cruse Bereavement Support also offers bereavement information, helpline support, groups and one-to-one support in the UK.

### When to reach for more help

Consider speaking with your GP or a qualified mental-health professional if grief is making everyday life feel persistently unmanageable, you are experiencing severe or worsening distress, trauma symptoms are dominating daily life, or you are worried about your safety. If you feel you may act on thoughts of harming yourself, seek urgent help through emergency services or a crisis service.

### A few things that can help between difficult waves

- Reduce expectations on the hardest days. Grief uses physical as well as emotional energy.
- Keep basic needs visible: fluids, simple food, medication, sleep routines and fresh air where possible.
- Choose one or two safe people you can be honest with rather than feeling you must explain yourself to everyone.
- Create a small ritual of remembrance or acknowledgement if that feels right for you.
- Notice triggers and anniversaries in advance and plan extra gentleness around them.
- Allow moments of laughter, interest or rest without treating them as betrayal.

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## Books I would recommend exploring

Books cannot tell you how you should grieve, but sometimes another person's words help us recognise something we have not yet been able to say ourselves.

Beyond Tears

Ellen Mitchell et al.

Written by bereaved mothers about living after the death of a child.

The Grieving Garden

Suzanne Redfern & Susan K. Gilbert

Parents describe different ways of surviving profound loss.

Bearing the Unbearable

Joanne Cacciatore

Compassionate reflections on love, grief and traumatic bereavement.

### A reflection to take with you

What helps me feel connected to my child in a way that feels comforting rather than something other people think I should do?

### From me to you

Please be gentle with yourself. Grief is not a test you pass, a set of stages you complete, or evidence that you are failing to cope. Sometimes the most helpful thing we can do is make a little more room for what is already there. You are allowed to take this one day - or one hour - at a time.

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