

Here are a range of suggestions that other parents have found helped them cope in the time following their child's death. I hope very much that some of them will help you:

- Plan a funeral and/or memorial service that acknowledges who your child was. Several religious traditions have frameworks for these services, and usually you can honor your child's unique qualities in some way— through photographs, videos, scrapbooks or through what you, your other children, other family members, and classmates write, draw, or say. Preparing these tributes may provide a focus and objective for those who are grieving. If you have no religious affiliations you may find a place, inside or outside— perhaps special to your family— where friends and family can gather to remember your child together. Perhaps you can find poems or writings that reflect your child's qualities and your sadness about her premature death.
- Allow yourself some positive moments each day, when you are able to laugh or hug someone. Share a positive memory about your child, without blaming yourself for having these moments. Consider these moments of reprieve and renewal that will help you recover physically and emotionally.
- Allow and experience the waves of grief as opposed to fighting or avoiding them. If you feel after a year or longer the waves have not decreased at all in either intensity or frequency, consider a consultation with a grief counselor.
- Recognize the rawness of your emotions (positive and negative) and tolerate the up-and-down mood swings.
- Allow yourself to do just the basics for a while— and congratulate yourself for doing them. Recognize getting out of bed each morning is an achievement. Take tasks one at a time, a day at a time.
- Allow associations with your child to enter your mind in whatever form they take and be open to sensing his presence.
- Keep busy. Do whatever tasks you feel up to— even if it is just a few each day— at first that occupy your mind and body.
- Divide your focus between your loss and the challenges of the new world without the physical presence of your child.
  - Find what helps your particular style of grieving.
  - If you feel strong emotions, can you let yourself safely experience them? Does talking about what you feel help? If so, are there people you can talk with? If you share your emotions comfortably and feel better having done so, you may benefit from joining a group with other bereaved parents. The group may help you feel less isolated, may allow you to share your intense feelings and to help others. But beware of joining a group too soon after your loss— say for at least six months afterward. Many parents said they felt too vulnerable early on and hearing other people's stories made them feel worse, not better.
  - If you have consistent negative thoughts, what helps them shift? Does speaking about them help? What happens if you imagine the feelings that might be connected to the thoughts? Can you experience the feeling— be it sadness or anger— that likely goes

along with the thought, and does that help the thought shift? Does finding other projects to occupy your mind, either connected or unconnected to your child's memory, give relief? If the thoughts have become repetitive ruminations that do not shift your perspective, allow no resolution, and are preoccupying you more and more, consider consulting with a grief counselor. These ruminations may prevent any movement in your grief.

- If you feel physically restless and become agitated, try a physical task— either one that is connected with your child, like keeping up his grave site, or one that is unrelated to him, like jogging, swimming, or exercising.
- If you have somatic/ physical symptoms like high blood pressure or tension headaches or are getting sick more frequently than usual, consult your primary care physician. You may need blood pressure medication. You may benefit from exercising and/or using relaxation strategies to release or lower tension. Consider trying yoga. Physical activity is really important.
- If you cannot sleep, consider consulting with your doctor to get sleeping medication to use for a while. Lack of sleep makes healing more difficult. If you start exercising, you may get to sleep more easily.
- Recognize your style of grieving may be different from your partner's or your other children's, and that what helps one of you may not help the others. If some of you feel better sharing your emotions but others do not, a bereavement group may be good for some of you but not others.
- Recognize you are each doing your best to handle your mutual loss and don't take personally the differences in style or criticize one another for the differences.
- Ignore those who tell you your task is to let go of grief or "get over it."
- See your task as finding a way to accommodate your grief, which may in some form be part of you always— perhaps finding meaningful ways to continue feeling connections with your child in a manner that makes sense to you. (See the examples that follow.)
- Recognize you are likely not to be taking good care of yourself, so force yourself to have regular medical check ups. You are more vulnerable to major health problems when you are deeply grieving.
- Recognize grief is a process with ups and downs and that recovery may not be returning to where you were but finding where you are now and how to live with that.
- Recognize the only grief to avoid is "stuck" grief— where you always feel devastated and overwhelmed, or continue to have the same recurring negative thoughts, questions, or images in your head or avoid anything that reminds you of your child.