

Made Known

PARENTING PAMPHLET

Sibling Grief

- Unknown Author

Sibling grief
Is so complex
And so sad
A dream collapses;
Pain and confusion take its place.

What can I do
To take your pain
Away, my son?
You are not to blame,
You are so innocent,
Yet I dare not protect you.
Instead I shall include you.

Silence and pain
They are us.

“Everything that lives—plants, animals, and people—has a beginning and an end. Some living things have a long time between their beginning and end. Some are alive only a short time. How long or how short, doesn’t really matter. It is still that plant’s, or animal’s, or person’s lifetime. And each lifetime is important.” – A Grieving Sister

PARENTING THROUGH GRIEF

Grief can be debilitating. It often brings intense exhaustion and depression. And while it is normal to withdraw a little as you mourn the loss of your baby, it is important to explain what is happening to your other children.

Children are very sensitive to the mood of their family and the tone in their household. When a parent withdraws into their grief, children may fear that the parent they once had is now gone along with their unborn sibling. They have no way of knowing the separation from you will not be forever. It is not unusual for a child to believe he or she is at fault for your pain and withdrawal. That’s why it is especially important to tell your child that you are sad because the baby died. Let your child see you cry and tell them it helps to cry when you feel this sad. Make sure you tell them that you are not sad or angry because of anything they did and that you will feel better, even if it takes some time.

Because this time is sure to be abnormal or somewhat tumultuous for your living children, try to keep their routine as normal as possible *while still taking care of yourself*. Instead of sending your child to grandma’s for a week, see if grandma could come stay in your home to help out. Make sure you ask for help and recruit people who are familiar to your child, who can reassure your child and let them talk about feeling sad.

TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD

DON'T SAY:

- » “The baby is sleeping.” *(This causes fears of what might happen when they go to sleep.)*
- » “God needed another angel.” *(This could cause anger towards a God who takes people away forever.)*
- » Nothing. *(Children are acutely aware of your feelings. They know something has happened and what they imagine is almost certainly worse than the reality.)*

DO SAY:

- » “Our baby died.” *(Using the correct terms and clear, simple explanations will lessen any confusion.)*
- » “Her body was not working.” Or “He was born too soon.” *(Children will need an explanation, but it’s important to keep it honest and simple. It’s also important to distinguish between baby’s body and theirs or baby’s body and your own. “Our baby’s body wasn’t healthy like yours and mine.”)*

At different ages, kids respond to death and grief differently:

Ages 2-6:

- Need plenty of physical comfort from safe adults
- Likely to think death is temporary
- Believe their thoughts and wishes could have caused the death
- Fear that they or their mom/dad will die too
- Learn by repeating information over and over

Ages 6-9:

- Understand the permanence of death
- May view death as an enemy they can avoid or beat
- Have feelings of responsibility because of their developing conscience
- May carry an overwhelming burden to protect you from feeling sad
- Need to see you expressing your feelings to know it’s okay to show emotion

Ages 10-12

- Still struggle with feelings of responsibility
- May have strong ideas about memorial rituals
- Become critical of the way others react to the death
- Are very sensitive to your and others’ needs
- Need to see you expressing your feelings to know it’s okay to show emotion

Teens

- Have an adult understanding of death
- Could be more fascinated by the biological details
- Have very strong feelings about the unfairness of death
- Need someone to listen to them instead of offering solutions
- May say cruel or insensitive things, but can benefit greatly from your honesty and acceptance of their feelings

REMEMBERING

It is important to include those in your home in remembering your baby. Here are a few ways you can memorialize your baby together:

- » Plan a memorial service (large or small).
- » Plant a tree or shrub in the baby's honor.
- » Celebrate the baby's special day each year with a fun family outing.

Books

For Children:

Something Happened by Cathy Blanford

For Parents:

A Silent Sorrow by Ingrid Kohn and Perry-Lynn Moffitt

When a Baby Dies by Rana K. Limbo and Sara Rich Wheeler

Empty Cradle, Broken Heart by Deborah L. Davis, Ph.D.