

PATHWAYS CENTER *for* GRIEF & LOSS

GRIEVING THE DEATH OF A CHILD

The death of a child is a unique grief experience. Parents don't expect to outlive their children and naturally feel a responsibility to protect them. When parents are unable to prevent a death there is an increased potential for guilt to complicate grief. This may make it difficult to seek support from others, leading to feelings of isolation. Consider the following:

- Even if you have experienced other losses, the pain from this loss may be very different. You are grieving the loss of a future - the hopes and dreams you had for your child.
- There is no "right way" to grieve. Your experience is unique to your needs and situation. Beware of the fallacy of believing you should be coping a certain way by a particular time.
- You may never reach an acceptable answer for the question, "Why?" Part of the grieving process is learning how to live with the unanswered questions.
- You may experience intense anger – at God, the unfairness of the situation, medical personnel or others who may have been involved in the death.
- Others may find it difficult to face the reality of losing a child. You may therefore feel alienated from those who do not know how to respond to your loss.
- Look for support beyond family and friends who may also be overwhelmed by your loss.
- Seeing other children around the age that your child would be can evoke a variety of feelings. Be gentle with yourself as you discover what you need in coping with these situations.
- If your child lived with you, take time with the decisions about when to go through his/her things and what to do with the bedroom. Each individual and family is different in their grief and their timetable. Do what is right for you.
- Look for meaningful ways to honor the memory of your child.

In time, your grief will produce healing. Healing does not mean forgetting. You will always remember your child. Eventually the memories will bring comfort and help you discover new meaning in life.