

Bereaved Parents of the USA



*Offering Support, Care and Compassion for Bereaved
Parents, Siblings and Grandparents Following the
Death of a Child*

BEREAVED PARENTS RAISING THEIR GRANDCHILDREN

Our child has died, and we are now caring for our grandchildren. We are traveling on a journey of inordinate sadness and joy. We are so deep in the pain of losing our child, and yet we must take on the role of "surrogate parent" to these precious children. Even though we are their grandparents, our roles have been somewhat readjusted.

We feel we cannot possibly take care of ourselves, so how can we possibly take care of our child's children, children who need and expect us to take care of them.

Here are a few things we have learned on our journey:

We must let our grandchildren know we too are in pain, but that we will do the best we can to help them. Baby steps! One small step at a time! We must share our grief with them, learn all we can about theirs, and let them learn from us. It's okay to let them see us cry, hear us yell, or do whatever it takes to bring us a measure of peace, but we must let the grandchildren know their grief is very important to us too. We can read together, laugh together, cry together, but we must also give ourselves time to be apart. They should know we cannot always be there, as we are trying to take care of ourselves too, for if we don't take care of ourselves, how can we possibly take care of anyone else?

Many things have happened to our grandchildren since the death of their parent. They may have moved, changed schools, left other family members behind. Their whole world has been turned upside down. These changes are stressful for anyone, but they are compounded with the loss of their parent.

We can seek counseling, which may be beneficial to all of us. It is an extra lifeline for our grandchildren when we cannot be there because of our own battles with grief.

We must do the Four T's: Touch, Talk, Tears, and Time. When we are in pain, just knowing someone else cares is so important. So.....

- TOUCH each other when crying. Hold hands, hug, or place your hand on their shoulder.
- TALK about feelings and don't hide from them. Be open and honest so they will know we have some of the same fears and concerns they do.
- TEARS, let them cry and let them see us cry. It's healing and cleansing. We must never be ashamed of our feelings, and this tells everyone it is okay to grieve.
- TIME, only time can help heal the grief and help us understand that we learn from each other in sharing.

We may notice some things going on in the lives of these dear children. Behavior and personalities may change. They may be searching to find who they are and where they belong, and they are floundering in all this newness and sadness. We must be patient with them, but we cannot tolerate bad behavior. They need to have rules, and they need to know that we care enough to enforce those rules. We should not mistake bad behavior for grief.

At the same time, we must let them know, they also have to make allowances for our own behavior changes. We have both lost the same person. We have lost our child, while they have lost THEIR parent, their guide, and their very selves.

It is a difficult time for all, but if we stick together, do the best we can, and get outside help, we can make it. We can join support groups that serve our needs best, some with our grandchildren. Above everything, we must let them know they are wanted and needed.

Together, we will all find hope and forge a bond that will last forever.

To have the privilege of having our grandchildren much closer is a blessing. The memories all of us share from before and after this death, are treasures no one can take away. We enjoy those days when the memories bring back tears and laughter, for they are healing days. The new memories are ones we can store away to enjoy and reflect on at those moments when each of us is alone.

However, there are times when some grandparents just cannot make this trip. They must not feel ashamed, but search for someone who can care for these precious children and who will benefit from having them in their lives and who will do the very best for them.

Whatever we decide is best for them, our grandchildren must always know how much we love them and that they are not alone on this grief journey.

This is not an easy journey but one worth taking. It is a roller coaster ride where we are looking at the new "countryside" and how it has changed for each of us. We promise the joy far outweighs the sadness.

*Written by Sue Bowditch in loving memory of her daughter, Karron Russell, and granddaughter, Melody Russell, and in honor of Karron's father and Melody's grandfather, Ben, and Karron's children and Melody's siblings, Brytani and Derak Russell.
BP/USA Tampa Bay Chapter, July 2007*

Additional Information

BP/USA has a website with chapter locations, brochures, articles, and the newsletter along with contact numbers for BP/USA and similar groups.

BP/USA publishes a national newsletter, *A Journey Together*, which contains articles of interest to bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents on grief. It also has book reviews each month to help you select books that will be helpful to you in your grief. Other support groups and upcoming Grief Gatherings and Conferences are also included with information and other opportunities for bereaved parents to meet together.

For further Information contact:

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