



# HOSPICE MESSAGES OF HOPE

*When a Child Dies*

When a child dies, both parents grieve and cannot completely understand the pain of the other. When death has touched our lives, our reactions are so different and there are many reasons for the added stress: shock, denial, rage, anger, guilt, depression, bargaining, self-condemnation, blame and fear. We may expect our spouses or family to understand what we feel and be unwilling, or even unable, to express fully what is happening inside us. We may feel our grief is so powerful that we could lose control if we risk talking about it.

## ACCEPTING THE REALITY

Be patient with yourself. Remember grief takes a lot of energy and you need the help of relatives, friends and possibly a professional counselor. Don't be afraid to ask for help from those close to you when you need it. Some relatives and friends will not be able to handle your grief. It is important to find someone who cares and understands with whom you may talk freely. Feelings of guilt, real or imagined, often consume parents. They surface in thoughts and feelings of "if only." As parents, we generally do the best we can in parenting. Remember, God does forgive; you can also forgive yourself. Accept help and support when offered and know that it's OK to need comforting. We all feel and express grief differently. The differences between how men and women experience grief are not in pain or loss, but in their styles of coping. Women are more likely to seek sources of support (friends and family) and attend support groups. Men may become more isolated and have a fear of "breaking down" in front of others. Remember this and you will feel less distraught or isolated when family members don't react as expected.

## HEALING

Lean into the pain. You can't go around it, over it, under it or outrun it. Mourning is a time of restoring emotional balance when a loved one has died. Crying is an acceptable and healthy expression of grief and releases built-up tension for mothers, fathers and family members alike. There may be awkward moments with friends and relatives. Let them know how you feel and that it is OK to mention the child who has died. Marriages grieve when death has touched our lives and someone is no longer in our daily existence. As parents you have experienced the same death, but your reactions are so critically different. For many couples, this can become a time of drawing closer, sharing pain and fear, supporting one another and allowing each to ebb and flow through grief. Sometimes a marriage can become volatile following a death in the family. The complicated patterns of grieving affect all marriages, whether the death was a parent, sibling, child or other close family member. Reactions to the death of a child may include loss of appetite or over-eating, insomnia and sexual difficulties. Bereavement entails a loss of energy and lack of concentration abilities for some time. Your body needs nourishing food, rest, exercise and sunshine.

## SIBLINGS

Tend to the needs of your children. Children are often the forgotten grievers within a family. Though it is a painful time, try to make them feel loved and included in planning and decision making. Children can be sad one minute and playing the next. Young children can absorb only limited amounts of information. Answers to questions need to be brief, simple and repeated when necessary. Reassure your children that they have been and will continue to be loved and cared for.

*(continued on the back)*

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## ANNIVERSARIES

The anniversary of your child's birth and death and holidays can be a stressful time. Take into consideration the feelings of the entire family as to how the day should be spent.

## EXTENDED FAMILY

Remember that aunts, uncles, grandparents and other family members also are experiencing emotions of loss. Parents and family members grieve when they witness milestones of other children and families - baby showers, the first day of school, graduation, college, marriage and having their own family.

*OSF Home Care Services is here to support you and wants to meet you wherever you are in your grief journey.*

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