



Healing After Loss of a Child

By Teri Claassen MSW, LCSW, LCAC

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“A wife who loses a husband is called a widow. A husband who loses a wife is called a widower. A child who loses his parents is called an orphan. But...there is no word for a parent who loses a child, that's how awful the loss is!” - Neugeboren

“When a parent dies, you lose your past; when a child dies, you lose your future”.
- Anonymous

Losing a child is one of the top fears parents face. It is one of nature's cruelest moments. Whether it is due to stillbirth, miscarriage, sudden infant death syndrome, illness, or after years spent with the child, the pain is intense and crippling. The emptiness and total loss of control can spiral into depression, hopelessness, and a sense that a part of you is dead. I will never forget the scene in the movie *Steel Magnolia* when Sally Field is grieving the loss of her adult daughter, Shelby. The magnitude of her pain is so severe that it is painful to watch. If you are experiencing this traumatic loss in your life, we want to offer you some ways to cope and heal from the pain in which you are living.

Hold onto your memories- Many people feel this helps them keep their child alive. Whether it's creating a memory box, a memorial at the gravesite, buying a special piece of jewelry to represent them, relying on your spirituality, or writing letters in a journal to your child, these can give you a sense of connection--lessening the intensity of the loss.

Know that it is okay to never stop grieving- It is okay to not have a sense of “I'm over it.” The pain is always with you and stays with you the rest of your life. However, learning a healthy way to “hold” the grief can actually keep you connected to your child. Many

parents learn to incorporate their grief into their daily lives in a way that makes it manageable rather than all-consuming.

Allow yourself to feel your feelings- Keeping your pain inside and giving the front that you are okay is exhausting. Whether you outwardly express your pain or keep it private, the important thing is to feel it. Choosing to not process the pain will only hurt you in the long run. Feelings of anger, sadness, despair, hopelessness, shock, and isolation are all normal responses. Holding onto these emotions can become poisonous within you and start to take a toll on you both emotionally and physically.

Remember that everyone grieves in their own way- There is no right or wrong way to grieve as long as you are coping and not living in denial. Grieving is not always a cookie cutter approach. Give yourself permission to deal with the pain the way you need to and respect your loved ones if they need something different. It is not personal, nor does it mean that they are not in as much pain as you. They might just be processing the pain differently.

Develop a good support system- You are not alone. Talking to a therapist, going to church, attending a support group, or even joining a website forum for support can help. It doesn't mean there is something "wrong" with you or that you are weak for reaching out. Finding support can help normalize your feelings and take away the isolation you may feel.

Honor your child by recognizing anniversaries- Birthdays, special occasions, and the day you lost your child are all significant times to pay tribute to your child's memory. Finding a way that is right for you is important.

Don't avoid talking about your child and what happened- Your loss is real and does not need to be hidden. Whether you feel the need to mention a memory, talk about a song your child enjoyed, or even say you wish your child was here to share this moment with you, try not to hold back out of fear of what anyone else will think or feel.

Don't feel guilty if you "catch yourself" living again- Many parents don't know when it is "normal" to enjoy something in life again. If they find themselves laughing or smiling, they may feel they are betraying their child. But there is no timeline. Living your life does not mean you have forgotten about the loss of your child; it means you are coping with it. Give yourself permission to take pleasure in your life and live with your child's memory.

Don't expect to ever find a comforting answer to the question "Why?"- There will never be an answer to "why" that will feel okay to you. Spending time searching and tormenting yourself with this question will only keep you stuck rather than help you cope.

If you are having trouble coping with this loss, contact Renewed Horizon today to schedule an appointment.

About Renewed Horizon

Renewed Horizon is a Christian counseling practice that serves individuals, couples, families, and teens to address difficulties in life. It is a place to find guidance, healing, and hope when life feels hopeless and unimaginable.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” ~ II Corinthians 5:17



Teri Claassen received her Bachelor’s Degree from Anderson University with a double major in Psychology and Family Science. She completed her graduate studies at Indiana University where she received her Masters in Social Work.

Teri is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in Florida and Indiana and a Licensed Clinical Addictions Counselor in Indiana.

Teri was a Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) and a member of The National Council on Family Relations for 8 years. She is currently a member of The National Association of Social Workers.



Teri has been in private practice since 2004 serving various populations including individuals, couples, teens, families, and kids.