

## **25 Things Not To Say To A Grieving Parent...**

By Grieving Mothers (Notes) on Monday, June 27, 2011 at 7:46 pm

*As I said earlier, here is an article I wrote about the 25 Things Not To Say To A Grieving Parent. I hope the suggestions are helpful...*

**The subject of grief can be studied but the experience must be learned. Attending a Grief 101 class may educate a student about the mechanics of grief but it will never be able to explain the experience. No bereaved parent will discover a manual to train them how to grieve as each individual's grief journey will be experienced differently since there is no normal in grief patterns. Even less often we are trained in the skills of supporting a parent who has experienced the death of their child.**

**Due to the level of trauma, individual fear, lack of social understanding and society's phobia about and denial of death, most people do not know how to support another human being in grief. Parental bereavement is a life experience that cannot be conceptualized without first hand exposure. Therefore, friends, family, coworkers and others comforting the bereaved parent are at a significant disadvantage in knowing how to effectively support their loss. Although there is no right comment to articulate to the bereaved parent, it is well known what comments are damaging to those who are suffering this life changing devastation.**

**The following is a list of some of the most common statements expressed to bereaved parents, that, unbeknown to the supporter, are extremely distressing for that bereaved parent to hear.**

The Philosophical:

1. Time heals all wounds. (or time will heal you)

The death of a child leaves a permanent hole in a parent's heart and it takes a lifetime to learn to live with the hole and without your child. As alcoholics/addicts are never considered "recovered," neither are bereaved parents.

2. There must be a reason he/she died so young, so early, suddenly, etc.

That may be true but the unbelievable pain will not allow a parent to contemplate that possibility and life seems beyond reason at this point.

3. Everything happens for a reason.

Again, this is true from a spiritual perspective but a parent cannot think at this level until much further in the grieving process.

The Religious/Spiritual:

4. He/She is in a better place.

On a spiritual level this is true, but from a parent's perspective, in early grief, their pain says their child needs to be with them.

5. God needed him/her.

6. He/she needed to be in heaven.

7. God had bigger plans for him/her.

8. You should be happy he/she is with God.

And for some reason I (the parent) didn't?

9. God takes only the good ones, the best, the special ones, the pretty ones, the best ones, etc.

Even sideways complements are hurtful when the pain of loss is so excruciating.

10. God needed another angel.

Our suffering will not allow parents to think beyond the pain.

11. It's God's will.

Grieving parents may not be able to compartmentalize this theory at this point and may be experiencing anger at God for creating this situation.

12. God won't give us more than we can handle.

This pain is not comparable to any other life experience and not only do others not understand, but the bereaved parent is unsure as to whether they will be able to handle this level of pain.

The Obnoxious:

13. You'll get over it.

A child's death is something a parent never "gets over." One only learns to live with the pain and live differently.

14. You'll be back to your old self soon.

A parent who has experienced the death of a child will never be the same as they were before that loss. A changes parent in every conceivable way and parts of their previous life dies with the child.

15. He/she wouldn't want you to be sad.

If one has not experienced the death of a child there is no way to understand what a parent feels. Further, no one knows what a deceased child would want for their parent.

16. It's not like he/she was your only child.

17. You still have other children.

18. You can still have more children.

Children are not interchangeable. We love our children individually and each is not replaceable.

19. This too shall pass.

No, it will not. It will take a lifetime to move through this grief.

20. You need to move on.

The speaker has no idea of the magnitude of the loss. Grief is a process and one needs to address their entire being: spiritually, emotionally, behaviorally, cognitively, psychologically, socially, relationally, etc.

21. You will be able to move on and teach others about your pain.

Although this may be true in the future, it is difficult to imagine not feeling this pain and doing anything else with it in early grief.

22. Don't let this consume you.

Grief over a child's death does consume a parent and it seems like a very long time before a parent feels in control of their life again.

23. Do you still miss him/her?

This was their child and they have to live the rest of their lives without him/her. As long as they are gone, they will miss them.

24. This will make you stronger

Bereaved parents don't want to be stronger. They want their child back.

25. I know how you feel; I lost my grandmother, uncle, mother/father, and pet.

Parental grief cannot be compared to any other relationship loss. The inexperienced cannot understand that the parent loses not only their child and that relationship, but also a major part of themselves.

What helps:

1. Say the child's name.
2. Say "I'm sorry."
3. Give unexpected gifts to the family, to the other children, offer to run errands, shop, take kids to school, bring food, and demonstrate to the family that you care with your actions.
4. Call the parents to give them someone to talk to.
5. Don't compare your loss as it does not compare to the loss of a child.
6. Say "there are no words for me to say to you."
7. Say "I cannot imagine what you must be feeling."
8. Be silent and listen to the parent.
9. Research support groups and give this information to the bereaved parents.
10. Remember the child and mention them at holidays, family gatherings, their birthday, their death date and other occasions.
11. Create way to memorialize/honor the child. (Plant a tree, have a balloon release, plan a meal honoring the child, donate to a cause, create a scrapbook or art project, create a tradition about/for the child, email the parent when you have a memory about the child.)

Parental grief does not “go away” or “get better,” it just changes over time. Remember the above and you will become a positive part of a parent’s grief journey and not an invalidating memory during the worst time in their life.