

# How We Feel

We cannot expect others to understand how we feel after the death of a child, especially if they have never gone through it. Sometimes we get angry at how friends or relatives react and respond to us. They don't know what to say or how to say it and often they say it wrong, not meaning to be cruel, but not knowing any better.

We have a choice. We can be bitter and resentful to others or we can help them understand and be part of our grief journey. What follows are what I call 10 Grief Lessons for Others. By sharing these lessons with those close to you, a new level of understanding between you and others can help you down that long difficult road to recovery.

- 1. BE THERE FOR ME.** If you are my friend, reach out, talk to me, hold my hand, hug me. Know that even though we may say we are all right, we will never be all right again.
- 2. WE ARE DIFFERENT.** Understand that what has happened will change us forever and if you are my friend, you will accept me for what I have become, for who I am now, a person with different goals and different priorities. What was once important to me may no longer have any meaning.
- 3. BE A GOOD LISTENER.** We want above all else to talk about our children. To us, they will always be alive in our hearts, and we don't want others to forget them either. Don't be afraid to mention their names in our conversations. They were real people at one time, even though they are no longer with us. They had hopes and dreams we'd still like to share with others. Please don't pretend they never existed.
- 4. NO ONE ELSE KNOWS HOW I FEEL.** We all grieve differently, even husbands and wives. Please don't tell me you know how I feel. You don't. Rather than asking me, How are you feeling? ask me What are you feeling? I can probably give you a more honest answer.
- 5. I MAY GRIEVE FOR A VERY LONG TIME.** There is no set time limit to my grief. It may take me two years; it may take me five years. I have to do what is comfortable for me. Be patient. I will do the best I can in whatever amount of time it takes.
- 6. KEEP IN TOUCH.** Call me once in a while. I promise to do the same. Invite me to lunch or to a movie. I will eventually go, because I will eventually feel better. Don't give up on me and don't forget me. I am trying to do the best I can right now.
- 7. I MAY CRY AT TIMES IN FRONT OF YOU.** Please don't be embarrassed, and I won't be either. Besides being a natural emotion, crying is also a cleansing emotion. By crying I can relieve a lot of anger, frustration, guilt and stress. And best of all, I feel much better after a good cry.
- 8. I PUT A MASK ON FOR THE PUBLIC.** Don't assume just because I am functioning during the day that I am over it. I will never get over it. I try to function normally because I have no other choice. You should see me when the day is over, and I am in the privacy of my own home and free to let my emotions out. My day mask comes off and I am just a mother, aching for her child.
- 9. SOME DAYS MAY BE OVERWHELMING.** The slightest thing can trigger a bad time. It can be a song, a place I go, a holiday, a wedding or even smells or sounds. If I break down and start crying or seem to be in another world, it is because I am thinking of my child and longing for what I will never have again.
- 10. LET ME DO WHATEVER MAKES ME HAPPY.** Don't think me strange if I want to go to the cemetery a lot, if I want to buy a brick in honour of my child in every new building in town, or if I want to try to get new laws passed to keep this world safe for our children. I may need to try different things before I find what will be right for me in my new life. Encourage me to reach for the stars.

We will never forget our children. The pain never leaves. It just softens a little with time. We eventually function again, feel hope again, find joy in our lives. It is a long road that we travel, but with the help of friends and relatives who understand a little of how we feel and what we are going through, perhaps that road will lead to new paths to enrich our lives in new ways we never dreamed were possible.