Grief resources

We extend our sincere sympathy to you and your family, and assure you we will remember your child and your family.

Please use the information in this booklet to help guide your thinking about the decisions you will need to make following the death of your child. We know that this time is very painful and difficult. We can help you and answer many questions you may have.

We hope this information will be helpful to you and your family.

Important telephone numbers:

Social work department
(612) 813-6138, Children’s - Minneapolis
(651) 220-6479, Children’s - St. Paul

Child life department
(612) 813-6259, Children’s - Minneapolis
(651) 220-6465, Children’s - St. Paul

Chaplaincy department
(612) 813-6253, Children’s - Minneapolis
(651) 220-6369, Children’s - St. Paul

Bereavement Services
(612) 813-7216

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Written by:
Linda Lehmann, MA, LP
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Bereavement bibliography

Some parents find it helpful to read about grief. It helps them to understand their grief and connect with others through words. Most of the books in the list below can be found in local libraries and book stores.

**Recommended books for adults grieving a child’s death**

*After the Darkest Hour the Sun Will Shine Again (A Parents Guide to Coping with the Loss of a Child)* by Elizabeth Mehren; (New York, NY: Fireside, 1997); ISBN 0684811707


*A Journey Through Grief* by Alla Renee Bozarth; (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1994); ISBN 1568380372

*Forever Ours* by Janis Amatuzio MD; (Midwest Forensic Pathology PA, 2002) ISBN 0-9716287-0-x

*Lament for a Son* by Nicholas Wolterstorff; (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. Eerdman Publishing, 1987); ISBN 0-8028-0294-x

*Mothering an Angel* by Patsy Neary Keech; (Minneapolis, MN: Beavers Pond Press, 2001); ISBN 1890676993

*No Time for Goodbyes (Coping with Sorrow, Anger and Injustice after a Tragic Death)* by Janice Harris Lord; (Pathfinder Publishing of California, 2000), ISBN 0934793689


*Swallowed by a Snake (The Gift of the Masculine Side of Healing)* by Thomas R. Golden; (Gaithersburg, MD: Golden Healing Publishing LLC, 2000); ISBN 0965464911


*The Journey Through Grief* by Alan D. Wolfelt; (Ft. Collins, CO: Compassion Press, 2003); ISBN 1879651343


**Recommended books for grandparents grieving a grandchild’s death (in addition to any of the adult books in the list above)**

*For Bereaved Grandparents* by Margaret Gerner; (Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation, 1990); ISBN 1561230022

*Forgotten Tears: A Grandmother’s Journey through Grief* by Nina Bennett; ISBN 1591137640

**Recommended books for parents and caregivers of children and teens who are grieving**


*Healing a Teens’ Grieving Heart* by Alan Wolfelt; (Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press, April 2001); ISBN: 1879651246


*Helping Children Grieve: When Someone They Love Dies* by Theresa M. Huntley; (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers Revised 2002); ISBN: 0806642653

Recommended books for children grieving the death of a sibling

*A Child Remembers* by Enid S. Traisman; (Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation, 1994); ISBN 1561230693


*If Nathan Were Here* by Mary Bahr; (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing Co., 2000); ISBN 0802851878

*I Miss You* by Pat Thomas; (Hauppauge, NY: Barron’s Educational Series, 2001); ISBN 0764117645

*Lifetimes* by Bryan Mellonie; (Bantam - A division of Random House, New York, NY, 1983); ISBN 0553344021

*Lost and Found* by Ellen Yeomans; (Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation, 2000); ISBN 1561231290

*Rudi’s Pond* by Eve Bunting; (New York, NY: Clarion Books, 1999); ISBN 0095890675


*When Someone Dies* by Sharon Greenlee; (Atlanta, GA: Peachtree Publishers, 1992); ISBN 1561450448

*Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree* by William Miller; (New York, NY: Lee & Low Books, 1996); ISBN 188000034

Recommended books for teens grieving the death of a sibling

*A Child Remembers* by Enid S. Traisman; (Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation, 1994); ISBN: 1561230693


*Fire in My Heart, Ice In My Veins* by Enid S. Traisman; (Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation, Revised 2003); ISBN: 1-56123-056-1

*Flowers for the Ones You’ve Known: Letters from Bereaved Teens* by Enid S. Traisman; (Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation, 1995); ISBN: 1561230693


*When Death Walks In* by Mark Scrivani (Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation, 1991); ISBN: 156123012X
Internet resources

Many valuable resources are available on the Internet. Below are reputable sites and information about what they have to offer. Exercise caution when visiting websites outside of these; some may contain misinformation. If you do not have access to the Internet, visit the Family Resource Center at Children’s - Minneapolis, or Children’s - St. Paul, or your local library.

**Children’s Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota, Bereavement Services program**
www.childrensmn.org/Communities/Bereavementservices.asp

Bereavement Services offers copies of the program’s newsletter and information about events, and a tribute quilt.

**Allina Hospitals and Clinics**
www.allina.com/ahs/grief

Information about bereavement for adults, children, and families. Also includes a listing of Minnesota support groups and a bibliography.

**Compassionate Friends**
www.compassionatefriends.org

This organization’s mission is to help families in the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child and to provide information to help others be supportive.

**The Dougy Center**
www.dougy.org

Through their National Center for Grieving Children and Families, this organization provides support and training locally, nationally, and internationally to individuals and organizations helping children and teens in grief.

**Fernside Online**
www.fernside.org

A non-profit, non-denominational organization serving grieving children and their families. Fernside believes that children can rebuild, so they gently encourage sharing stories, feelings, and memories with trusted friends, honoring each one’s search for a new beginning.

**Grief**
www.mentalhelp.net

Links to information about grief and bereavement support and online videos. Click on “Topics” then “Grief & Bereavement Issues.”

**GriefNet**
www.griefnet.org

An Internet community of more than 30 e-mail support groups and two websites. Supervised by a practicing psychologist in Michigan.

**M.I.S.S. - Mothers In Sympathy and Support**
www.misschildren.org

The organization’s mission is to allow a safe haven for parents to share their grief after the death of a child; education is the its main focus. MISS provides support to parents who have experienced stillbirth, neonatal death, and infant death from any cause including SIDS, congenital anomalies, and trisomy 13.

**SIDS Network**
www.childrensmn.org/services/sids

This website offers up-to-date information and support for those who have been touched by SIDS or other infant death.
Support Groups

Joining a support group can be very helpful for a variety of reasons. Parents tell us that support groups offer them a place to talk about their child in a safe setting. They appreciate being able to connect with other bereaved parents to get and give support.

Support groups help reassure bereaved parents that their grief is a normal reaction to their deep sense of loss. Support groups also can be helpful to children and teens because it helps them see that they are not alone, that there are other kids just like them who are grieving.

For information about support groups and for listings of support groups in your area, check the websites listed below.

Children’s Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota
www.childrensmn.org/Communities/Bereavementservices.asp

Allina: Abbott Northwestern, United, Mercy, Unity
www.allina.com/ahs/grief.nsf

The Center for Grief, Loss and Transition
www.griefloss.org

Fairview
www.ridges.fairview.org/Community_Health/grief/

Methodist Hospital
www.parknicollet.com/Classes/grief

North Memorial Hospital
www.northmemorial.com/classes_support

Lakeview Hospital
www.lakeview.org/chaplaincy_services.aspx

It is also possible to find information about grief support groups in your particular area by using an internet search engine to search the following terms with the name of your community (i.e. grief resources, Minneapolis):

- Grief support groups
- Grief resources
- Children’s grief
- Bereavement support groups

You may also contact Bereavement Services for information on resources and programs in your area. Call a bereavement coordinator at (612) 813-7216.
The journey of grief

What to expect when you grieve

How to cope with your grief

We extend our sincere sympathy to you and your family and assure you we will remember your child and your family. We know that this time is very painful and difficult. We hope this information will be helpful to you and your family.

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Written by
Linda Lehmann, MA, LP
Theresa Huntley, LICSW
The journey of grief

You have now begun to take a very long journey called grief. It is the loneliest, most painful journey you will ever take. It is the hardest work you will ever do. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. It is just important to allow yourself to grieve.

Grief is one of the most misunderstood of human experiences. Because it is misunderstood, others may offer advice to you about how much or how little you should grieve, as well as how long you should grieve.

Remember that you are the expert about your own grief, no one else. Try not to pay too much attention to others’ expectations about your grief. It may be impossible to live up to their expectations. However, it is important that you understand grief in order to understand your thoughts, feelings, and reactions.

While grief is unique to each person, grief follows a fairly predictable course. It takes most people three to four years to do the major portion of their grieving, though your grief, like your love for your child, will always be with you.

This booklet briefly describes the process of grief:
- You are in shock
- Your body, mind, and spirit react
- You are in deep despair
- You take a journey inward
- You will integrate your child’s death into your life
- You grieve over your lifetime

You are in shock

This phase of grief is characterized by:
- shock
- numbness
- disbelief

Immediately following the death, there can be a period of shock, numbness, and disbelief. Even if a child’s death was expected, there is almost always a period of time in which there is shock. If your child’s death was not expected, the shock, numbness and disbelief can last for several months.

Initially, the death may not seem real. You might believe that you are in some kind of bad dream, wishing you could wake up and that it will not be true. While the world may be going on around you, you may feel like you are not a part of it.

During this time:
- allow others to step in and help you with practical matters.
- try to get any nagging questions around the death answered.
- allow the funeral rituals to begin to help you face your reality.
Your body, mind, and spirit react

This phase of grief is characterized by:
• intense reactions of your body, mind, and spirit.
• coping behaviors to hold off the pain.

As the shock, numbness, and disbelief lift, you will begin to feel the rawness of your grief as it assaults your system. Your body, mind, and spirit will react strongly to the death of your child. You will experience many of the reactions listed on the Common Grief Reactions of Adults section. Diligent self-care is very important when your grief is so raw.

Because the grief is so painful, you may try to postpone the full brunt of it by relying on coping styles that you have used in the past. You may try to keep yourself busy, so that you don’t have to feel your pain or you may try to deny your pain. While these attempts will help you hold off your pain at first, eventually you will have to let yourself feel the pain.

During this time:
• self-care is of primary importance.
• allow healthy coping techniques to guide you as you let the pain of your loss slowly in.

You are in deep despair

This phase of grief is characterized by:
• deep sadness.
• high anxiety.
• yearning for your child who died.

Once you can allow yourself to feel the depth and breadth of your pain, you have entered a phase of your grief that is characterized by despair. It doesn’t get much more painful than this. Depression is almost constant. Anxiety can be quite high because you are not sure whether you are going to make it or not. You may question if you can go on. You may wonder whether you will ever feel any different than you do right at this moment, whether you will ever feel an ounce of joy again. You may have a profound sense of yearning for your child.

For some parents, this deep sense of despair can be comforting. As long as they feel this much pain, they believe they will not lose their connection to their child. They worry they may lose that connection. The pain helps to keep them connected. The challenge to you as you move through your grief is to find ways to keep your connection to your child strong through your memory work rather than through your pain.

When you are in the depths of despair, it is difficult to imagine that you will ever feel any different. The pain you feel now is a necessary part of your grief. You will not always be in this much pain.

There will be more periods of deep sadness as you move through your grief that will come and go. These periods may resurface on your child’s birthday, the anniversary of the death, holidays, family gatherings, or at times in which your child missed the important milestones that other children reach, such as going off to school.

During this time:
• allow yourself to feel the pain of your grief.
• recall your child and share your memories with others.
You take a journey inward

This phase of grief is characterized by:
- internal processing.
- search for meaning.

Eventually the pain will lessens as you take a journey inward. During this time, you will be deep in thought. It will be a time of personal reflection as you think about what you have lost, what you have left, and how you will live out the rest of your life without the physical presence of your child.

You will think about how the death of your child affects how you will live your life, how your child who died continues to fit into your life, what your child taught you, how you will ensure that your child will be remembered, and how the death of your child will change you. You’ll think about these things in both positive and negative ways.

During this time:
- allow yourself time and space to reflect on where you have been and where you are going on your grief journey.
- seek out others who have a long history with you so they can remind you who you were and who you are becoming.

You will integrate your child’s death into your life

This phase of grief is characterized by:
- making plans for the future.
- focusing on your child’s life rather than death.
- renewed energy.
- new interests.

After you have begun to work through some of the issues described above, you will now put your child’s death into the larger picture of your life. Immediately following your child’s death, the death is the central theme to your life story.

Someone once remarked that, “Grief is a love story that needs to be told.” You will need to tell that story over and over again. As you move through your grief, you will come to realize that your child’s death is not your only story; it’s a part of your life story. You will look ahead rather than look back and realize that you don’t leave your child behind; you take your child with you into the rest of your life. You will have more energy, be able to feel joy once again, and not feel guilty about it.

You will have shifted your relationship with your child who died from a relationship of presence to a relationship of memory. This new relationship will help you to remain close to your child.

During this time:
- find ways to continue to memorialize your child to keep your connection strong.
- allow yourself to feel joy and moments of pleasure without guilt.
- continue to find ways to ensure that others will not forget your child.
Your grief over your lifetime

As you move through your grief:
• thoughts of your child will comfort you rather than only cause you pain.
• the loss of your child will transform you if you open yourself up to the possibilities.

Time does not heal your grief, although it helps. It’s what you do with your time that heals you. If you honor your grief and give it a place in your life, you can explore the depth and breadth of your pain. To honor your grief means that you pay attention to it and allow yourself to work through all of your thoughts and feelings.

The grief surrounding the death of your child will be a life-long process. Eventually you will come to a place in which your grief does not overwhelm you. You will find comfort in the memory of your child, rather than only pain. You will begin to focus on your child’s life rather than your child’s death.

The loss of your child has the ability to transform you as you re-examine and redefine your values and beliefs. Your sense of self may be changed. Some aspects of you that were present before your child died will be gone forever. Other parts of you went away for a while and will return. Still other parts of you are new pieces of your identity as you incorporate this experience into the totality of your life.

For the rest of your life:
• continue to honor your grief when it emerges.
• allow your child’s life and memory to permeate your life and also allow yourself to focus on other aspects of your life as well.

For more information, contact Bereavement Services at (612) 813-7216.
Grief and relationships

Bereavement Services
Comfort and support when a child dies
Grief and relationships

How the loss of a child changes relationships

How to deal with the changes in relationships

We extend our sincere sympathy to you and your family and assure you we will remember your child and your family. We know that this time is very painful and difficult. We hope this information will be helpful to you and your family.

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Written by:
Linda Lehmann, MA, LP
Theresa Huntley, LICSW
Grief and your relationships

When your child dies, it may feel as if the world has stopped and your life is over. Although the physical relationship with your child has ended, your relationships with other people in your life have not. Somehow, in the midst of your grief, you have to determine how to relate to the people around you.

While you may not be able to influence how people respond to your grief, this information may be helpful to you in managing your ongoing relationships. Hopefully, it can help you decide whether or not to engage with people who are genuinely attempting to offer support. It can also help you to be somewhat more tolerant of those who may have unrealistic expectations of you.

Some people – as they learn more about your loss and what it means for your life – will be able to accommodate your needs. Others may be unwilling or unable to do this for any number of reasons.

How these people (i.e. your family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors) respond to your grief will vary. At times, you will find yourself faced with the task of educating others about your loss and the needs you have related to it. Given how overwhelming this may seem at a time when you are so vulnerable, it will likely be helpful to consider the affect your loss may have on the following relationships.

Relationship with your partner

When your child dies, you and your partner both grieve. You are both affected. Given your shared loss, your ability to be available and responsive to one another’s needs is seriously compromised.

- **Be open to your differences in grieving.** Part of this will come from the realization that you cannot be totally dependent upon the relationship with your partner in this process. Gradually, you learn to accept one another as separate people, with individual needs and different ways of managing them. You realize you don’t need to be threatened by these differences. Rather, you choose to remain aware of your partner’s grieving process and share in it to the extent that you both find helpful.

- **Remain connected in some way.** If you and your partner are together, know that communication with one another will be critical to the health of your relationship. Although you will grieve differently and most often separately, it is very important to remain connected in some way. Sharing the highlights of your grief will enable you to have an awareness of your partner’s needs, as well as a sense of where she or he is headed on the journey of grief.

- **Seek assistance from others.** At times it may be best for you to seek help from other people, especially early on in your grief. In seeking the support of others and meeting some of your own needs, you will be in a better position to be available to your partner to some extent, minimal as it might be for a time.

- **Give the other person some space in grief.** You also may discover there are periods when you need to give the other person some space in grief. Part of the work that has to be done will involve time alone, away from one another. You each have your own style of grieving and need room to be able to do what is best for you.
If the child that dies was your only child, you will be faced with questions such as, “Who am I now that my child has died?” “Am I still a mother?” or “Am I still a father?” When people ask how many children you have, how do you respond in a way that honors the memory of your child and isn’t too painful for you to answer directly?

If you and the parent of your child were not in a relationship at the time of your child’s death, you have likely lost an important link to one another. It is important to restate that the death of your child has forever changed your life. You have changed; your partner has changed. This means, then, that your relationship with one another also must change. Realizing what the implications of this will be for both of you will reveal itself gradually over time as you do the difficult work of grief.

**Relationship with your surviving children**

When children lose a brother or sister, the loss is significant and has far-reaching, lifelong implications. Having had the firsthand experience of a child’s death, their sense of innocence has been shattered. Life is encountered with a new sense of vulnerability and a heightened awareness of mortality.

**Clarify with your child the cause of the sibling’s death**

Children may feel a degree of responsibility for their sibling’s death, believing that something they said, did, or thought was somehow the cause of it. It will be important for you to clarify the cause of death, emphasizing that your child was not responsible for it.

In losing a sibling, children also may lose their parents to some extent. As overwhelmed as you may be in your grief, this may cause you to be emotionally and possibly physically unavailable to your child for a time.

**Ensure for the ongoing care of your children**

A child’s sense of security and well-being stems primarily from their feeling of being taken care of by people they know and trust. When this is threatened or absent, children can feel abandoned, often unable to face what is before them given their limited resources. It will be important for you to ensure the ongoing care of your children. When possible, have a person your child is comfortable with come to your home to provide this care. This enables your child to continue to have access to you in an environment that is familiar.

**Provide your child with the opportunity to interact with other children who have had a sibling die**

Grief for children can be an isolating experience. In general, not many of their friends or peers will have had a loved one die, particularly not a brother or sister. Providing children with the opportunity to interact with other children who have had a sibling die is invaluable. Not only does it help them to feel less alone in their grief, it also offers them a chance to share their stories and to benefit from one another’s experiences.

As a parent having experienced a parent’s worst nightmare, the death of a child, you may find yourself becoming overly protective of your remaining children. While it is natural to want to protect your children from harm, you are very aware that this is not always wise or within your power. As frightened as you may be, your children need to be allowed to live a life that offers them the appropriate opportunities for ongoing growth and development.
Relationship with your parents

When your child dies, your parents face the grief that accompanies the loss of a beloved grandchild. In addition, they also experience the agony of seeing you – their child – in overwhelming pain. They know there is little, if anything, they can do to fix it.

Just as you wanted to make things “all better” for your child, so too do your parents. The fact that you are an adult doesn’t alter their desire to protect and care for you as their child.

You may experience your parents as very supportive, finding you are able to look to them for guidance and support. If this is the case, it can be beneficial to designate specific tasks to them. Regardless of what they do, by being able to help you in some way, they are indirectly meeting their need to care for you.

While they can’t change the fact that your child has died, they can be helpful to you as you face the challenge of rebuilding a life that integrates the memory of your child into it.

If you find your parents so overwhelmed by their own grief that they are unable to be available to you, you may decide it is necessary to distance yourself from them temporarily. Immersed as deeply as you are in your own pain, you will have a limited ability to help others.

If you seem to be shouldering the weight of your parents’ grief, consider having someone you trust address this with them. It may be that your parents feel so inadequate or helpless in the face of your pain that they have neglected the need to seek support for themselves. If this is the case, your parents may benefit from a gentle reminder about the importance of self-care.

Relationship with your friends and coworkers

While friends and coworkers may want to help, often they are at a loss as to how to be supportive. Over time in your grieving process, you will learn who are the people you can turn to for support and who are the ones that are unwilling or incapable of providing assistance that is of any benefit to you. Bereaved parents frequently talk about this, often indicating surprise at whom they thought were their friends versus those who actually supported them.

You may have to educate others

It is likely you’ll find yourself needing to educate other people. Although it can seem too overwhelming to do, some people have little or no understanding of the grieving process if they have limited experience with death. If you don’t make the effort to inform your friends and coworkers about your loss and what it means for your life, you may find yourself facing expectations that are unintentionally unrealistic.

With a combination of time and hard effort, you will gradually move through the period of acute grief and into the longer process of grieving. You will learn how to be present and attentive to your grief and the needs you have regarding it, while also being able to function in your day-to-day life. You will determine who are the friends and coworkers who can offer the gift of presence, the people who listen quietly and invite the telling of your story over and over. When you express a feeling or need, these people won’t feel a need to try to “fix” your grief because they realize the value of allowing you to find your own answers as you search for the meaning of your child’s death.
Request and then accept support

Requesting and accepting the support offered by friends and colleagues is, in a sense, a gift you can give to yourself. If it enables you to let go of the pain of grief, to move to a point where you are able to celebrate the life of your child while also honoring his or her memory, then it will be worth the effort and courage involved.

Being a single parent may also mean you need to ask for more help from your parents and other extended family members. Others may want to overreach their care for your children by trying to take over. While they may see this as helpful, it is important that your children feel secure in you as their primary caregiver.

If you do not have surviving children, friends and family members may try to minimize your loss by telling you, “You can have other children.” They may not recognize the importance of your loss or give you much permission to grieve your child.

It may help to join a support group of bereaved parents so you can get support from others who understand what it is like to have a child die. If you have access to the Internet, there are many chat rooms online where you can get a lot of support from other single bereaved parents. Refer to the Grief Resources booklet in this packet to find out about Internet sites.

The loss of a child when you are a single parent presents very unique challenges to you and your grief. That’s why it is important to ask for and get the support you need to grieve your child.

For more information, contact Bereavement Services at (612) 813-7216.

Relationship with others as a single parent

As a single parent, the death of your child can be a particularly lonely experience. If you have other children who need you, it can also be overwhelming. You may find that your peers cannot relate to your situation. Or, you may find that your married friends cannot possibly understand the deep sense of loss you will experience as a single parent grieving the death of your child. This lack of understanding may give you a sense of isolation in your grief and separate you from others who in the past you counted as friends.

Friends may not know how to help you. You need to tell them specific ways. It is important to ask for help so that you can have the space and time you need to grieve your child.

If you have other children who need you to care for them, your resources may become depleted rather quickly. Try to increase your circle of support to include others who will give you a break every once in a while. They will bring fresh energy to your children that you may not be able to provide right now.

In addition, it is important that you encourage your children to develop strong relationships with other adults in their lives in addition to yourself. In this way, your children will have others to go to when your grief is overwhelming you.
How do I know if I need counseling?

Bereavement Services
Comfort and support when a child dies
How do I know if I need counseling?

As you move through your grief, you may wonder whether you need the support and help of a grief therapist to help you cope with the loss of your child.

Although not everyone who experiences the death of a loved one needs counseling, there are some reasons why you might benefit from it. The following points may help you to answer the question, “How do I know if I need counseling?”

Your grief doesn’t change

Initially, you may be in constant pain and on an emotional roller coaster. As you move through your grief, it should change. You should be able to look back on your grief journey and see that it has changed over time.

This is not to say that you will no longer be in pain. You’ll experience highs and lows. There will be times in which you may feel that the pain is not all consuming. You will find that you have moments, days, and even sometimes weeks when you feel like you are on an even keel.

If, however, your grief does not change over time, it may mean that something is blocking the normal progression of grief. You may need the help of a therapist to help you discover what is impeding your grief.

Your self-esteem remains low

When a child dies, it can be a devastating blow to your self-esteem. You may wonder why your child died and why you survived. You may wonder whether you did everything you could to care for your child. You become aware that despite your devotion, your child died anyway. You may wonder why your love wasn’t enough.

These thoughts may lower your self-esteem, make you feel helpless in the face of it, and feel bad about yourself. As people move through their grief, most come to realize they did everything they could. They come to understand that their child’s death was not caused by anything they did or did not do.

However, if your self-esteem remains low, you may benefit from counseling to help you sort through why these feelings remain.

Your grief significantly interferes with your ability to keep up with your daily routine

Early on in your grief, you may find that the routines of life may be difficult to accomplish as the enormity of your grief wreaks havoc with your life. But after a few weeks, most people get back into some kind of routine because life drives them to do so.

If you find that you are not able to keep up with your daily routine after the first weeks after your loss, you might benefit from counseling to help cope with your loss.
You find yourself withdrawing from others or are emotionally isolated

Emotional support is key for healing one’s grief. We all need a witness to our pain. There will be times when you need moments alone as you grieve. However, generally you will need to be surrounded by others who care about you and give you much needed support.

If you find yourself socially isolated or intentionally withdrawing from others, counseling may break through the loneliness of grief or resolve some negative feelings toward others.

You are consumed with anger, fear, guilt, or another emotion

It is common to feel a range of intense emotions following the death of a child. Early on in grief these feelings may be overwhelming as they come in waves. You may feel deep sadness, loneliness, anger, or regret.

However, if any of these emotions, especially anger, fear, or guilt, take hold and prevent you from fully feeling your grief, counseling may help.

You cope with your feelings with addictive behavior

The intense feelings of grief may cause you to want to numb your pain with addictive behavior to ease suffering. This addictive behavior may take the form of drinking alcohol, taking drugs, overeating, overworking, and overspending to name a few.

If you find that you are using something to prevent feeling the pain of your grief, it will not work. The grief will be waiting for you until you are ready to feel it. If you need help to overcome this addictive behavior, you may need the help of a professionally trained grief therapist.

You think of suicide frequently or have made suicide attempts

It is not unusual to long for your child and to wish to be with him or her. Parents often remark, “I would never do anything to hurt myself, but if I fell asleep and never awoke that would be OK with me.”

However, if you think about harming yourself or have frequent thoughts about suicide, seek help immediately in order to keep yourself safe. Daily thoughts of suicide and an inability to pull yourself out of this kind of thinking means that you are in need of the care of a mental health professional as soon as possible.

A list of grief therapists in the Twin Cities area is available from Bereavement Services: call (612) 813-7216 or e-mail bereavement@childrensmn.org.
Information about adult grief

Bereavement Services
Comfort and support when a child dies
Information about adult grief

Ways to cope with physical, mental, emotional and spiritual reactions

Parents may show a variety of reactions after the death of a child. All of the reactions listed in this booklet are considered to be normal responses. Most of them will lessen after a few weeks or months. However, they may re-occur again on important days such as birthdays and holidays.

The spiritual reactions will remain for quite some time because they center on the ways grief can define and alter one’s life.

**physical reactions**

Sleep disturbance  
Appetite disturbance  
Indigestion  
Headaches  
Overly sensitive to sights, sounds, smell, and touch  
Dry mouth  
Tightness in chest  
Hollowness in stomach  
Lump in throat  
Excessive sweating  
Food loses taste  
Frequent illness

**mental reactions**

Short-term memory loss  
Difficulty concentrating  
Confusion and “spaciness”  
Preoccupation with the loss  
Routine takes effort  
Difficulty making decisions

**ways to cope**

Get rest when you can  
Eat smaller meals or drink high nutrition drinks  
Have a complete medical check-up  
Drink lots of water  
Increase physical exercise  
Intentionally take deep breaths  
Take a multi-vitamin  
Spend time outside  
Take a long, hot bath or shower

**ways to cope**

Take one day (or hour) at a time  
Simplify your life. Try not to add more responsibilities  
Take time to rest your mind  
Use positive self-talk. Tell yourself, “I am going to be OK.” Or, “I am doing the best I can.”  
Focus on something peaceful  
Ask for help  
Postpone major decisions as much as possible
emotional reactions

A wide range of feelings that may include anger, sadness, depression, anxiety, despair, and loneliness

A sense that any expression of emotion may get “out of control”

Wide mood swings that may be moment-to-moment at first

Guilt, including survivor guilt (“It should have been me that died”)

Relief may be present after a long illness (guilt at feeling relief)

ways to cope

Share your feelings with someone you trust

Check in with your feelings every day

Find ways to express your grief in physical ways

Find ways to express your grief through creative expression, such as writing, art, or music

Stay in the present as much as possible

Surround yourself with people who support your grieving

Join a support group or participate in individual counseling

Allow yourself to feel your pain

spiritual reactions

“Why” questions

Anger at God

A change in beliefs and values

Change in identity

Questions or doubts about God

Loss or strengthening of faith

A need to find meaning in the loss

Sensing your child’s presence (thinking you feel, see, or hear your child)

ways to cope

Pray or meditate

Find support in your faith community

Read books about grief, philosophy, and faith

Set apart a special place and allow yourself to be in it every day to allow yourself to grieve

Be alone with your grief to honor it

Be quiet and listen to what your spirit needs

Nurture yourself

Journal thoughts, prayers, laments, and memories

For more information, contact Bereavement Services at (612) 813-7216.
Information about your children’s grief

Bereavement Services
Comfort and support when a child dies
Information about your children's grief

We extend our sincere sympathy to you and your family, and assure you we will remember your child and your family.

Please use the information in this booklet to help guide your thinking about the decisions you will need to make following the death of your child. We know that this time is very painful and difficult. We can help you and answer many questions you may have.

We hope this information will be helpful to you and your family.

Important telephone numbers:

Social work department
(612) 813-6138, Children’s - Minneapolis
(651) 220-6479, Children’s - St. Paul

Child life department
(612) 813-6259, Children’s - Minneapolis
(651) 220-6465, Children’s - St. Paul

Chaplaincy department
(612) 813-6253, Children’s - Minneapolis
(651) 220-6369, Children’s - St. Paul

Bereavement Services
(612) 813-7216

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Written by
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Julie Turner, parent
What you need to know about your child who is grieving

This booklet is intended to give you general information about how children grieve and how best to support them. As with all children, there are individual differences and the age levels outlined are provided as guidelines. Children will respond to their grief in their own unique way and may not necessarily respond in the ways discussed here.

Below are things to keep in mind when supporting your child’s grief:

• Soon after the death you will need to answer these three questions for your child:
  - Did I cause the death?
  - Am I going to die too? (Will you die too?)
  - Who will take care of me?

• Most often children and teens will show us they are grieving with their bodies and by their behavior. Very young children may not have the language to tell us how they are feeling. Older children and teens may try to hide their feelings or be reluctant to talk to you about their concerns because they may not want to upset you. If you observe your child’s body and behavior, she will give you cues about her grief.

• Children can only handle the pain of their grief in small doses. They will then need to go off and be children, playing and being with friends. For this reason, they will grieve off and on as they grow up and into adulthood.

• They will need to hear the story of their sibling’s death over and over again as they gain more language, knowledge, and experience. Everyone in the family should have the same story. Don’t change the facts of the story for younger children. Instead, use language that they will understand. Eventually they will integrate the entire story into the larger context of their lives.

• Your children will look to you for cues about how to grieve. You are their role model. If you are open and honest about your thoughts and feelings without placing undue burden on your child, he will learn that it is all right to grieve. Be aware of your own feelings, behaviors, grief reactions, and how they may impact your children. It is important to take care of your grief so that you can help your child with his grief.

• Encourage activities to honor or keep alive memories of the sibling who died. These connections provide meaningful ways to remember a loved one and maintain a continuing bond.

• You cannot protect your children from the pain of their grief. They need to feel the pain. Comfort them when they feel the pain.

• Invite other loving, responsible adults into your child’s life who can be available to your child when your own grief is overwhelming.
Common grief responses of children and teens

Infants and toddlers

Common grief responses

Physical
Changes in appetite
Changes in sleep patterns
Frequent colds or other illnesses
Feeding issues

Emotional
Increased separation anxiety
Irritability, more temper tantrums
More clingy

Pre-School (ages 3-5 years old)

Common grief responses

Physical
Changes in appetite
Changes in sleep patterns
Nightmares and night terrors
Bedwetting
Stomachaches, headaches
Reappearance of toileting accidents
Frequent colds or illnesses

Emotional
Irritability
Increased separation anxiety
Attention-seeking behavior
Much more or much less active than usual
May show little reaction
Overreaction to simple events
Regression, for example thumb sucking, baby talk, or immature behavior
Grieve in short periods of time, be sad and then run off and play, seeming to be “OK”
Less interested in normal play activities

Mental
Shorter attention span
Distractedness

Understanding of death
No understanding of what death is, but will react to the emotions of those around them

Understanding of death
Death is usually not understood as permanent
Magical thinking is common. May think that the death was caused by their thoughts, actions or feelings
May take information given to them literally. For example, “My sister died when she was sleeping. Maybe I will die when I go to sleep.”
Play may often reflect aspects of the death, such as the events leading up to and following it
May talk a lot about the sibling who died, even to strangers, to try to make sense out of it, or may create stories about the sibling who died
Abstract concepts such as heaven may be very difficult to understand
May wonder how the sibling who has died will be able do “natural” things underground, such as eat or go to the bathroom
Will react to the emotions around them
Infants and toddlers

**Warning signs**
Failure to thrive
Cannot be comforted
Ongoing behavior that is very aggressive or very withdrawn

*Displaying any of these warning signs may indicate your child needs professional help by someone who has expertise in childhood or adolescent grief.*

**Ways to help**
Keep routines as normal as possible
Provide consistent care by parents or other caregivers
Offer physical nurturing through holding, rocking, using comfort measures familiar to the child
Wrap infant in soft blanket

Pre-School (ages 3-5 years old)

**Warning signs**
Destructive behavior
Acting much younger than age for a long period
Inability to pull out of low moods
Sustained separation anxiety
Seems stuck at a certain developmental stage
Ongoing behavior that is very aggressive or very withdrawn
Acting much older than age
Always sad

*Displaying any of these warning signs may indicate your child needs professional help by someone who has expertise in childhood or adolescent grief.*

**Ways to help**
Explain what the term “dead” means. When a person is dead, they no longer breathe, go to the bathroom, grow, feel any pain, etc. Avoid confusing words such as “sleeping,” “lost,” or “took a trip”.
Make sure the child has the same facts as everyone else in the family, with less detail.
Keep routines as normal as possible.
Provide consistent care. Reassure the child that there are people to take care of him/her and who those people are.
Provide opportunities for play to help children express their thoughts and feelings.
Prepare the child for what they will see and do at the funeral.
Reassure the child that nothing they did, said, or thought caused the death.
Remind the child that your sad feelings are about the death of your child, not about him/her.
Provide physical and emotional affection, such as hugs, smiles, and holding time.
Continue to talk with your child about the death, including the circumstances. Some children like having something they can do with their hands while you talk, such as playdough, a small slinky, or crayons and paper.
Model healthy coping behaviors. For example, maintain routines, talk about the death, allow the expression of feelings, eat healthy food, and exercise.
Wrap infant in soft blanket
Common grief responses of children and teens

School-age children

Common grief responses

Physical
Changes in appetite
Changes in sleep patterns
Stomachaches
Headaches
Fatigue
Frequent colds or illnesses

Emotional
Irritability, mood swings
Regression; immature behavior, more dependent on adults
Much more or much less active than usual
High anxiety
May have marked changes in behavior, such as increased aggression or withdrawal
Not interested in normal activities
Anger, sadness, loneliness
Reluctance to leave home and parents
Worry about own health or health of others
Attention-seeking behavior

Mental
Shorter attention span
Short-term memory loss
Difficulty concentrating
Very distracted
Preoccupied with loss
Interest in music, books, movies with negative themes

Understanding of death

Early Elementary (Grades K-3)
 Begins to see death as universal and irreversible. Most children understand this concept by age 9
 May see death as contagious
 Curiosity about the biological aspects of death and how it affects the body
 May think of death as a person such as a bogeyman or ghost

Upper Elementary (Grades 4-6)
 Very sensitive to the changes in the home and in relationships, and to how the loss will impact them
 Able to think in more abstract terms and have a need to talk about an after-life
 Curiosity about the biological and sometimes gory details of the death
 May relate death to violence
 Sees death of loved one as unfair
 May be reluctant to show emotions outwardly
School-age children

Warning signs

- Destructive behavior
- Taking on too much responsibility
- Independence beyond one’s years
- Stealing
- Inability to pull out of low moods
- Seems stuck at a certain developmental stage
- Difficulty with peer and family relationships
- Increased fighting and aggression
- Risky behavior
- A sustained drop in school performance
- Refusal to talk about the loss
- Sustained, extreme concern about own health or health of others
- Refusal to go or to stay in school
- Prolonged low self-esteem
- Being obsessed with death
- Over-identifying with sibling who died, trying too hard to be like that child

Displaying any of these warning signs may indicate your child needs professional help by someone who has expertise in childhood or adolescent grief.

Ways to help

- Provide safe outlets for physical expressions of grief. Offer physical activities that will release tension from the emotional pain.
- Encourage drawing, music, dancing, and playing to help children express their grief.
- Reassure the child that there are people to take care of him/her, and who those people are.
- Encourage participation in good-bye rituals and memory and legacy making opportunities.
- Explain what the term “dead” means. When a person is dead, they no longer breathe, grow, feel any pain, etc. Avoid confusing words such as “sleeping,” “lost,” or “took a trip.”
- Make sure the child has the same facts as everyone else in the family.
- Keep routines as normal as possible.
- Model healthy coping behaviors. For example, maintain routines, talk about the death, allow the expression of feelings, eat healthy food, and exercise.
- Advocate on behalf of your child by helping his teacher understand how a child’s grief can affect learning.
- Watch for feelings of guilt. Reassure the child she did not cause the death.
Common grief responses of children and teens

Teens

Common grief responses

Physical
Changes in appetite
Changes in sleep patterns
Stomachaches
Headaches
Fatigue
Frequent colds or illnesses

Emotional
Irritability, mood swings
Much more or less active than usual
High anxiety
Marked changes in behavior, such as increased aggression or withdrawal
Not interested in normal activities
Worry about own health and that of others
Reluctance to leave home and parents or staying away from home
Not much display of emotion, may think that showing feelings means they are weak
Attention seeking behavior

Mental
Shorter attention span
Short-term memory loss
Difficulty concentrating, distracted
Preoccupied with loss
Interest in books, movies, or music with negative themes

Understanding of death

Teens are more like adults in their thinking and they are capable of abstract thought. However, emotional reactions are still not fully mature and may be intense.

Teens have a better understanding of the implications of death, both short- and long-term. They are aware of the impact on self, individuals in the family, and the family as a whole.

Teens struggle with the death of a child in particular because they may see themselves as invincible or immune from bad things happening, yet may realize that life is fragile.

May question the meaning of life and spiritual or religious beliefs

May want to assume more of an adult role
Ways to help

Respect teens’ needs to rely on their friends for support more than you. Help them identify peers or other trusted adults with whom they can share their thoughts and feelings.

Model healthy coping behaviors, e.g., maintain routines, talk about the death, allow the expression of feelings, eat healthy foods, exercise.

Discuss changes that may occur in the family structure.

Advocate on behalf of your teen by helping his/her teachers understand how grief can affect learning.

Watch for feelings of guilt. Reassure the teen he did not cause the death.

Try not to assume that teens can handle their problems without help or support. Keep lines of communication open. Be available, but respectful of privacy.

Encourage participation in good-bye rituals and memory or legacy-making opportunities.

Provide safe outlets for physical expressions of grief as well as creative activities that will allow for the emotional expression of grief.

Teens

**Warning signs**

- Destructive behavior
- Taking on too much responsibility
- Independence beyond one’s years
- Stealing
- Inability to pull out of low moods
- Seems stuck at a certain developmental stage
- Difficulty with peer and family relationships
- Increased fighting and aggression
- Risk-taking behavior
- A sustained drop in school performance
- Refusal to talk about the loss
- Sustained, extreme concern about own health or health of others
- Refusal to go to or stay in school
- Prolonged low self-esteem
- Seeking comfort through sex, drugs, or alcohol
- Eating disorders
- Isolating oneself from others
- Becoming obsessed with death
- Over-identifying with sibling who died, trying too hard to be like that child

*Displaying any of these warning signs may indicate your child needs professional help by someone who has expertise in childhood or adolescent grief.*
Ideas for bereaved siblings

When a child experiences the death of a sibling, it is important that he or she be encouraged to find ways to keep the connection strong with that sibling. One of the ways that can be done is to engage in activities that promote memory making. Just as parents need to find ways to continue to remember their child who died, children and teens also need to find ways to memorialize their sibling who died.

Below is a brief list of ways to help brothers and sisters create memories of their sibling. Kids often have ideas, too, about ways they would like to remember their brother or sister, and they may need help and support to carry them out.

- Provide scrapbook materials to make a memory book.
- Create a memory quilt, blanket, or pillow case made out of the clothes of the child who died, or a material that is comforting.
- Make picture frames to hold pictures of the child to put in the sibling’s room.
- Provide a journal for friends and family to share a special memory.
- Give children a journal to record thoughts and feelings about their sibling who died.
- Write a story about their sibling.
- Write letters or make drawings to the sibling who died.
- Visit the Songs of Love website at www.songsoflove.org, to create an original song.
- Create a memory box to hold items that were special or important to the child who died.
- Donate a book to the school library in honor of the child who died.
- Plant a tree, flowers, or garden in memory of your child.
- For a day, wear a favorite color, team logo, or cartoon character of the child who died.
- Plan an activity that will become a tradition in memory of the child who has died. For example, game night, ice cream night, special outing, or favorite meal.
- Buy a gift on the anniversary of your child’s death or on their birthday and donate it to the charity of your choice.

For more information, contact Bereavement Services at (612) 813-7216.
Creating meaningful rituals and legacies

Bereavement Services
Comfort and support when a child dies
Creating meaningful rituals and legacies

We, the parents of children who have died, extend our most sincere condolences on the death of your child. We know the pain felt when a child dies. We know there are no words to describe the feelings that surround this experience and these circumstances.

The staff and volunteers of Children’s Bereavement Services program have put together this compilation of what our families have found helpful as they moved through this time of profound sadness in their lives and what they continue to do to keep them going.

We do not intend this to be a “how to” guide; but, rather, something to get you thinking about what is important in your own family life and how you may want to proceed.

We wish you and your family peace.

Important telephone numbers:

Social work department
(612) 813-6138, Children’s - Minneapolis
(651) 220-6479, Children’s - St. Paul

Child life department
(612) 813-6259, Children’s - Minneapolis
(651) 220-6465, Children’s - St. Paul

Chaplaincy department
(612) 813-6253, Children’s - Minneapolis
(651) 220-6369, Children’s - St. Paul

Bereavement Services
(612) 813-7216

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Contributors 10

Written by:
Rhonda DeBough-Insook, parent
Linda Lehmann, MA, LP
Sharon Morrissey, illustrator, parent
Julie Turner, parent
**Funeral and rituals**

*These are some of the rituals or funeral elements that were important for us at our children’s funerals.*

**Caring for my child**

I held Bobby’s body during the prayer service. It was meaningful for me to hold my baby boy for one final time.

We had a private viewing for the family prior to the public viewing. My husband and I had a very private time just before the funeral to close the casket.

I didn’t want her in a hearse; I had her transported in a mini van.

We laid our daughter, Trinity, in her bassinet for viewing and the funeral.

We had a candle ceremony around her. Each candle had a picture of her tied to it.

I made sure I was the one to dress her.

We bathed her right after she died.

We clipped some of their hair to keep.

I wrapped her in a pink knitted blanket so that she wouldn’t be cold.

We took pictures of our son before the funeral started. We did not do this when our first son died, but I wish we had.

People in Phillip’s life got to hold him. I’m glad we had that time.

**The casket**

We sent her back the way we received her, completely natural.

We had a closed casket because I didn’t want people to remember Noah swollen.

I provided good pictures of him.

We put several items in her casket: a picture of her mom and dad, a blanket from her godmother, a ring of her mother’s, a picture of other family members.

It was very important that our son be buried with his favorite blanket and stuffed animal.

She had a special bonnet that we buried her in.

We buried her in a combination of her parents’ baptismal outfits.

**The funeral or memorial service**

We made a video of the funeral for our pre-school children who were too young to attend the funeral.

I invited his doctors, nurses and other important professionals to the funeral.

We made Andrew’s wake and funeral as happy as we could with pictures, a video of him at Disneyland, and of him happy at home. We celebrated his life at both the wake and the funeral.

We asked people to look through his scrapbook and write a message in it.

It was important for us to reflect the beautiful life of our son and the many lives this small child affected.

We gave all members of the family cross necklaces. We also put a necklace on each of the boys to be buried with them. We still wear our necklaces and feel connected with them.

My husband carried Jared out of the church after the funeral. He hadn’t planned on doing this.

We recorded the funeral service. It gives us great solace to see the outpouring of people who care.

We set up a memorial for Emily. This helped people acknowledge her death.

We brought a lot of his favorite toys on the floor in the memory room adjacent to the chapel. This honored him because he was such a floor kid.

I was so sick and I had her very sick twin in the NICU, I didn’t do anything for her funeral.

We gave out mini M&Ms and ring pops. These were her favorite treats.

We didn’t belong to a church, so we had her funeral at Como Zoo. A place where she spent a lot of time.

I wrote a letter to Ethan and had someone read it for the eulogy.
Having a traditional funeral was important for the family so that they could grieve, too.
We refilled the Mylar balloons she received during her hospital stay and placed them around the funeral home.
We picked out meaningful Bible readings.
We had people at our home after the service rather than at a reception hall.

**Photo rituals**
We displayed the few pictures that we had.
We made picture boards and displayed special letters to him.
There was a PowerPoint of photos of his life.
We had someone make a special video that we played at the visitation and funeral.

**Music rituals**
We played some of her favorite songs.
The children’s choir at church sang.

The music was very important. We found musicians that played lullabies.
Instead of using traditional funeral music, we chose songs that were familiar to him.

**At the cemetery**
We released yellow balloons with messages on them.

**How our families and friends contributed**
We had special friends participate in the Mass.
Each cousin carried a baby blue rose and placed it in a vase on the altar.
His sister and cousins led us in singing our son’s and his sister’s favorite song.
We read letters to our daughter from various family and friends. They told why her life and struggles were significant to them.
We handed out a program at the funeral that was prepared by many of our family members.

**Anniversary of your child’s death**

*This is what we do on the anniversary of our children’s death.*

**Creations**
I mailed out a photo compilation of Jacob and his family, a poem I had written, and a letter asking friends and family to help us remember Jacob.
His anniversary date is near Halloween; we carve pumpkins with different designs.
We made the cutest snowman.
The boys made snow angels.

We take the day off and we mindfully plant our garden. At 2:03 we have some silent time. After 6 years, I look forward to “garden day.”
I make a wreath of flowers that we tie to a cross that her father built.
We did a missions project that included building a playground in memory of our daughter. Doing something positive in her memory is very healing.

**Gifts**
We make a donation in our child’s memory.
We send a gift to the recipient of one of Daniel’s donated organs.
We donate small items for the families at Children’s.
Tributes

We have a gathering at our house in celebration of his life.

I put rose water on myself.

We asked people to do something that makes them smile, because that is how people remember him.

Same as his birthday. We celebrate Andrew.

I look through a scrapbook that I made for him.

We remember happy times with Connor.

We look at all the pictures of our son and remember the fun moments of his short life.

We go through his box of special memories I made shortly after he died.

We look through the binder of his medical records and realize that he was very sick and know that he is in a better place now.

We send cards to day care and the nurses to thank them for the love they showed our boys and our family.

We buy flowers for the church altar.

We give a plant to the day care where my son died.

We light a Jewish Yahrzeit candle.

I buy a dozen roses for Peyton.

We blow bubbles.

We prefer to remember his birthday rather than the day he died.

We have a special Mass.

We attend synagogue service where his name is announced.

We go to the zoo in honor of our son.

At the cemetery

I visit the cemetery.

We take a balloon to Nathan’s grave every year.

We start the day at the cemetery.

I like to just go and sit at the grave by myself.

We go to the cemetery on October 20 and at 7:30, the exact time he died; we read his favorite book by candlelight.

We visit the cemetery and sing hymns.

We have a picnic at the gravesite.
Birthdays

On our children's birthdays, we do these things to remember them.

At the cemetery

We meet at the cemetery at dark where we sing “Happy Birthday” and other songs from our hymnal.

We bring to the cemetery the night before her birthday a balloon, flowers, and a birthday banner.

We gather at the grave.

I bring my guitar to the cemetery and play his favorite John Denver songs.

We bring flowers to her grave.

We put balloons, poems, and stuffed animals at her gravesite.

We bring pastries and coffee to the cemetery and spend time talking about her.

We clean up his gravesite.

I take the day off work and go visit the cemetery.

Creations

Her birthday is December 10 so we decorate a tree on her grave.

We make our backyard beautiful with candles and decorations.

We hire a musician and we invite our friends over.

I mailed out a poem and picture of him to family and friends.

We each made a birthday card for him telling him how much we miss him and love him prepared by many of our family members.

Tributes

We wear tube socks, white T-shirts, sweats (Logan loved tube socks, white T-shirts and sweats), and watch his favorite movie, Peter Pan.

We have a birthday party, including cake from Woulett’s and invite some friends.

Since he is one of a multiple birth, we make cupcakes for each child — including him.

We have a special Mass said.

We say a prayer.

We share memories.

I take time to journal and write a letter to my daughter.

I buy or pick flowers for her and arrange them by a favorite photo.

We watch the video of her funeral.

We go to her favorite restaurant.

We let off fireworks.

We have a special family dinner.

We put flowers on the altar at church.

We release balloons at the time she was born.

It is important for us to involve our families.

We all went to her grandparent’s house to celebrate.

We had pizza and cake for her birthday party.

We made a list of things to do to remember and honor Jonathan.

Talk to special people in his life.

We look at pictures.

We light a special candle and let it burn throughout the day.

We have a birthday party, this is important for his siblings.

I don’t work on that day. It is a holiday for our family.
We planted a tree in his honor.
We try to include our two young children and do things that they can understand.
We eat his favorite food.

**Gifts**

We donate formula, diapers, and other baby items to families that are in need.
We sometimes receive presents from family members in memory of Tarryn.
I buy cake, frosting, and candles, things we need for a birthday party, and we donate it to a food shelf.
We donate money to organizations that help people with our son’s disease.
Our family begins to make fleece blankets a month before her birthday, and then we take one to each baby in the NICU on her birthday.
We purchase toys for our son and donate them to special needs children.
Our family donated a shark pup to Underwater Adventures in Gus’s honor.

**Family gatherings**

*When our family gathers, this is what we do to remember our children.*
We just talk about him.
Talk about happy times.
We light a candle for him everyday.
We don’t do anything specific. We just acknowledge his absence.
We include him in all our prayers.

Instead of setting a place for her at the table, we make a special centerpiece. It changes, and always includes a candle.
We gather in a circle, hold hands, pray, and remember Cathy.
Our family spends time together at the Minnesota Zoo, a place we enjoyed visiting with our son.
We say a prayer.
We eat his favorite food.
Holidays

On special holidays, we do these things to remember our children.

Creations
I made Christmas ornaments with Jonathan’s picture in them to give to family.
We make ice luminaries and let them burn all night.
We have a tree for Griffin in our dining room that I decorated with white lights and purple ornaments. Purple is the birthstone for February.
Everyone writes a special memory on a ribbon to put on the tree.
I change the decorations on her wreath to reflect the holiday.
Decorate a small tree in her memory.
We create our own family card with a photo and a ribbon. We ask people to tie it on their tree in memory of our son.
We decorate pumpkins and take them to the cemetery.
We draw our son’s face on a pumpkin.
We make cookies for all his teachers.
We make homemade valentines for family and friends.

Gifts
The first Christmas after my son died, we made care packages for each of the patients and their families that spent the holidays in the ICU at Children’s.
We use the money that we would have spent on her toward something or someone who needs help.
We buy Ethan a toy and donate it to Toys for Tots.
Her grandparents give us a money gift in her memory to use in a way that would please our daughter. This touches me deeply because it keeps my daughter’s memory alive in a way that benefits others.

Tributes
We hang the boys’ stockings with the others.
I put up the holiday pictures of my son in Christmas frames around the house.
We light a candle in memory while we open gifts.
We send out a Christmas letter and always mention our boys right along with our three living children.
For our Christmas card, I took a picture of our son holding a photo of her.
At the Christmas lunch, we lit a candle for each loved one we’d lost. I lit one for my daughter.
Recognition felt important.
She always gets a present under the tree and I always give a present from her.
The first Christmas without Ana, we had a black and white family picture taken. We made a card with that photo and next to it a picture of Ana and a special verse.
I find journaling to be very healing, especially on the holidays.
I take time to be alone with my memories.
I pray a lot.
I write a letter to him each Christmas and place it in his stocking.
We light a candle for him at dinner.
I talk to my other children about him.
I buy a special ornament to put on the tree for him.
In the center of our garden is a small blue spruce. We decorate this at Christmas.
Light a candle.
Keep a place at the table for her.
I write a prayer and light four candles.
Thanksgiving is the hardest holiday because it falls near her death. We just remember her more on this holiday.
We donate Easter lilies to the church for Easter service.
We planted a tree on the first Memorial Day after she died.
We call people and tell them we love them.
We wear red on Valentine’s Day.
We light her baptismal candle on her baptismal birthday and have a quiet family dinner.

**Mementos**

*These are mementos that we have of our children.*

We have a shadow box that has her first outfit, her hat, plaster handprints, booties, and a receiving blanket.

Shortly after she died, we came home and took pictures of every room in the house that had a touch of her in it. Toys on the floor, handprints on the windows, her sweet little jacket on the hook, anything she left behind.

We had her handprints and footprints taken at the hospital after she died.

I am glad that we have pictures of her after she died, she wasn’t struggling, and she was peaceful. She was so pretty.

We got a lock of her angelic blonde hair.

We have touches of her everywhere, it keeps her close to us.

We have a memory chest to keep his special memories.

A birth/death announcement was mailed to everyone.

**Gifts**

I dedicate my free time to volunteer for causes important to him.

We set up a tribute fund in our son’s name at Children’s.

We volunteer for some special events in memory of her.

**At the cemetery**

We place a small artificial tree at the cemetery.
We visit the cemetery.
We keep a lantern lit at Jayke’s grave.
We take Easter baskets to the cemetery.
We bring a picnic to the cemetery.
At my son’s unveiling ceremony, I read a poem and bought a rose for each family member to place on the grave for my son’s grave unveiling ceremony.

**Photos**

For family photos, we bring his blanket with his name on it or his toy kitty to be included in the photograph.

We have a picture of her in the new baby’s room.

After many years, I found a place that could add Sarah’s picture in the corner of our family picture. Finally, I had a picture of our entire family.

**Creations**

I’ve made note cards with dragonflies and a little saying inside.

I made address labels with his pictures with “In loving memory” beneath them.

I did a lot of art after Leah’s death. It helped me understand and express my grief.

We write down anything that catches us and makes us think of our child.

We made a shrine in our home. We have pictures, poems and notes from mommy and daddy to our son.

We created a scrapbook of his life from his birth to his death. We continue on with poems and writings that have been helpful after he died. We continue to add to it. His book never ends.

We made key chains with his picture on it to give to grandparents and godparents.
Gardening

How we used gardening as we grieved.
We made a special garden in her memory and had various family members contribute flowers/plants for the garden.
We’ve planted a special garden and walking path in our yard to remember her.
We planted a garden with plants like bleeding hearts, baby’s tears and mums. Caring for the garden is my way of still taking care of my boys.

We made him a memorial garden at our church.
I had a brick made for him at the “Angel of Hope” statue at the Arboretum in Maple Grove.
We made meaningful stepping-stones for the garden.

Keeping my child close

How we keep our children with us daily.
On the day she died, I put one of her socks in my pocket. I keep it there.
My husband wears an angel pin to remember them.
I wear earrings in memory of my boys, daily.
Each night our daughter kisses a picture of our son and says a prayer to him.

I wear a locket.
Symbols are very important to us. In our home we have roses for Adrian and lilies for Lillie.
We look for different things to wear or carry that remind us of him.
We try to include our two young children and do things that they can understand.
The following families contributed to this booklet in memory of their children

Baierl Morrissey Family in memory of Lillie and Adrian Baierl Morrissey
Biehn Family in memory of Cathy Biehn
Christoffers Family in memory of Bobby Christoffers
Cusick Family in memory of Matthew Thomas Cusick & Benjamin John Cusick
DeBough Insook Family in memory of Leah DeBough Insook
Friedrich Family in memory of Lillie Friedrich
Gilberg Family in memory of Phillip
Haas Family in memory of Sarah Haas
Hemphill Family in memory of Trinity Kae Hemphill
Hoepner Family in memory of Jacob D. Hoepner
Higgins Family in memory of Ethan Higgins
Johnson Family in memory of Samantha Johnson
Jones Family in memory of Noah Joshua Jones
Kantorowicz Family in memory of Nicholas Kantorowicz
Koltes Goulet Family in memory of Olivia Rose Goulet
Madsen Family in memory of Haley Nicole Madsen
Martinez Family in memory of Gus Martinez
McGhee Family in memory of Tarryn Joy McGhee
Michels Family in memory of Griffin Michels
Moore Family in memory of Emily Moore
Mudgett Kiene Family in memory of Logan Richard Randall
Nelson Family in memory of Ana Leigh Nelson
O’dash Family in memory of Jared O’dash
Poppler Family in memory of Justin Poppler
Reich Family in memory of Connor Stephen Reich
Rosenfeld Family in memory of Daniel J. Rosenfeld
Shilts Family in memory of Jayke Thomas Shilts
Smith Family in memory of Janna Smith
Spencer Family in memory of Peyton Louis Spencer
TenEyck Family in memory of Andrew TenEyck
Tranby Family in memory of Jonathan Wade Tranby
Wall Family in memory of Derek Len Wall
Weatherford Family in memory of Jessica Ann Weatherford
Wollo Family in memory of Jackson Wollo
The first days following the death of a child

Bereavement Services
Comfort and support when a child dies
The first days following the death of a child

We extend our sincere sympathy to you and your family and assure you we will remember your child and your family.

Please use the information in this booklet to help you following the death of your child. We know that this time is very painful and difficult. We can help you and answer many questions you may have.

We hope this information will be helpful to you and your family.

Important telephone numbers:

Social work department
(612) 813-6138, Children’s - Minneapolis
(651) 220-6479, Children’s - St. Paul

Child life department
(612) 813-6259, Children’s - Minneapolis
(651) 220-6465, Children’s - St. Paul

Chaplaincy department
(612) 813-6253, Children’s - Minneapolis
(651) 220-6369, Children’s - St. Paul

Bereavement Services
(612) 813-7216

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Written by:
Linda Lehmann, MA, LP
Mary Ratzlaff, LICSW
Caring for your child’s body

At the hospital
After your child has died, you will be encouraged to see, touch, and hold your child. While this may seem strange to you, many parents say that this time of saying goodbye becomes a profound family memory and helps them with their grief.

These suggestions may help:

• **Take as much time as you need.** After spending time alone with your child, you may want to invite other family members or friends to see your child. You may bathe your child, comb his/her hair, and dress your child in special clothing. Spend some time talking to, holding, and looking at your child.

• **Get answers to your questions.** Your health care provider may ask your permission to try to determine the cause of death through an autopsy or, if your child is an infant, genetic testing. While in some cases the cause cannot be determined, you may receive answers to some of your questions about your child’s death.

• **Provide for spiritual support.** You may find it comforting to lean on rituals and prayers that reflect your own faith and beliefs. Your own faith leader or the hospital chaplain can help you.

• **Gather keepsakes.** You may ask staff to assist or provide photos, footprints, and handprints to take with you. You also may take some of your child’s hospital items if you wish, such as the name band, blanket, or other momentos.

Burial

• **At the funeral home, you may see, hold, wash, and dress your child before burial.** Your faith tradition may have specific rituals or ways of providing care for the body.

• **You may choose to have your child’s body embalmed.** This is required if you are transporting your child’s body to another state or if there is a length of time before a public viewing or visitation.

• **Your child’s body can be buried in a cemetery or placed in an above ground crypt.**

• **Burial can be done in coordination with services of your faith tradition.**

Cremation

• **Cremations may be arranged through any funeral home.**

• **At the funeral home, you may see, hold, wash, and dress your child before cremation.** Your faith tradition may have specific rituals or ways of providing care for the body.

• **You may choose to have your child’s body embalmed, as mentioned above.** However, you may still have private family time with your child before cremation without embalming.

• **The cremains (ashes) can be buried as above, scattered, or placed.**

Remember: Whether you choose burial or cremation, arrangements can be made to care for your child’s body in a way that honors your beliefs.
**Autopsy**

If an autopsy or post-mortem examination is being done, ask Children’s staff whether this would affect your plans for services. While generally it does not, in rare instances it can affect an open casket viewing of the body. You may be able to limit which parts of your child’s body will be examined.

Once the autopsy is performed, the body will be released to the funeral home or crematory.

The results of an autopsy are not usually available for several months. You will be notified when the autopsy is completed and results are available. You may choose to set up a time to meet with your child’s physician to discuss the results.

The autopsy may be conducted at Children’s or at the medical examiner’s office. It is helpful to tell your funeral home about this. The funeral home will be able to provide the same kinds of services to you, wherever the autopsy takes place.

If you have questions about whether to have an autopsy or about how the results may benefit you, talk with your child’s physician or a pathologist before the examination.

Your child’s autopsy will be:

Date ____________________________________

Location __________________________________

Phone ____________________________________

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**Selecting a funeral home**

You will need to select a funeral home or mortuary to care for your child’s body and help you arrange services. Often, it is helpful to get input from family, friends, and spiritual leaders about your plans.

Things to consider:

- The location of the funeral home, service, or burial and its accessibility for family and friends
- Recommendations of reputable funeral homes from family, friends, or spiritual leaders
- Call several funeral homes to ask questions and to help decide which one best meets your needs.
- Costs will vary. You should consider the costs of:
  - Burial or cremation
  - Cemetary plots
  - Additional costs
- If you want to see your child before the visitation or memorial service, be sure to tell the funeral home staff.

You may choose to contact a funeral home while still at the hospital or when you get home. The hospital does not contact them automatically. The funeral director will set up a time to meet with you at their place of business. The director can help guide you through planning a service, selecting cremation or burial, writing obituaries, and coordinating with spiritual leaders.

Funeral homes that are a distance from the hospital often can arrange for a local funeral home to sign out your child’s body and transport the body to a funeral home in your area. If you have any cultural or religious preferences about transporting the
body, please contact the social worker or chaplain. Note: The Church of Blessed Kateri, (612) 824-7606, will transport deceased American Indian people to destinations within 400 miles.

If you would like to drive your child’s body to the funeral home, a special permit is needed. A funeral home has to come to the hospital to sign out your child’s body. Faxes are not permitted. This is not always possible.

If you know the name of the funeral home before you leave the hospital, tell a staff member who cared for your child, such as a nurse, chaplain, or social worker. If you choose the funeral home after you leave the hospital, call the pathology office at (612) 813-6711.

Name of funeral home, mortuary, or cremation society:
__________________________________
__________________________________
Address ______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
Phone number ____________________________
Appointment time ____________________________

Financial Resources

There are financial resources that may be available to help you with funeral costs. The hospital social worker can help you explore your options.

• Contact your county human services department and request information about funeral assistance. Notify your funeral director that you wish to apply for county funeral assistance and they can help you complete necessary paperwork. This contact needs to be made before you make final decisions about arrangements at the funeral home.

• Some funeral homes offer reduced rates for families of young children in financial need.

• Life insurance policies

• Faith communities, civic organizations, and employee assistance funds

• Help from family and friends

For more information, contact Bereavement Services at (612) 813-7216.
Planning the funeral

Following the death of a child at any age, many families find it helpful to plan and share in a memorial ritual or service. This may be part of your own grieving process as well as a tribute to your child.

There is no “right” or “wrong” kind of service. It simply should reflect your child’s life and your family’s faith and love. It will provide a way to express your grief and share strength for the days ahead. Whatever you plan, it should include cultural and spiritual traditions that are meaningful to you. This may be a small gathering of family or it may be a service open to family, friends, and your community.

Contact your place of worship or your religious leader to begin planning a service and to give spiritual support to you and your family. The hospital chaplain is also available to help you plan a service. In addition, funeral homes have information about people available to lead services.

Some funeral options to consider:

• Visitation or reviewal. This is a time for family and friends to gather before a service to view your child’s body and share memories. The casket may be open or closed. There may be a brief prayer service held during this time. Families may choose to bring photos and meaningful items to display. Refer to the “Creating Meaningful Rituals and Legacies” booklet for ideas.

• Funeral services. These can be held at a place of worship or at the funeral home. A casket or urn is present. Caskets may be open or closed. You may have a time of visitation before the service. A brief graveside service is often held after a funeral service for burial of the casket or urn. Urns also can be placed in a crypt.

• Memorial services. These can be held at a place of worship, a funeral home, or another location. The casket or urn is not present. The memorial service may be held instead of a funeral service, or it may be held after an extended period of time after the death. It may be held at a later date in addition to an immediate service.

• Graveside or committal services. These are held as the body or cremains are buried or placed. While this service is often held along with a funeral or memorial service, it can be done separately as well.

When planning your child’s service, find ways to make it personal, reflecting the uniqueness of your child’s life and what he or she means to your family. Your family, religious leader, hospital chaplain, and funeral director can help with resources and ideas.

Some families have chosen to include these in the service:

• pictures and collages
• footprints and handprints
• special toys, comforters, or clothes
• involving family in remembrances (readings or leading service, for example) or offerings
• favorite music or readings of your family or child who died
• videos and slides
• favorite toys, awards, or school work
**Tributes and Memorials**

Some families set up a memorial fund in their child’s name. This can be done at any time and gifts can be used in the manner you choose. Local banks can help you set up memorial accounts.

If you wish memorials to be sent to a specific group or organization, it is best to use their complete name and address in the obituary notice. Your funeral director can guide you in this process.

**Birth and death certificates**

**Birth certificates**

If your child is born alive at any gestational age, the hospital will complete a legal birth certificate.

A copy of your child’s legal birth certificate may be purchased through any local county registrar. For information about how to purchase a copy, contact them. You will be asked to show identification.

**Death certificates**

A copy of your child’s death certificate may be purchased through the health department or through any county registrar. You may contact the state registrar at (651) 201-5970 if you have questions. The funeral director can also obtain copies for you.

**Certificates of naming, blessing, and baptism**

If your child received a naming, blessing, or baptism while in the hospital, the certificate will be given to you or mailed to your home. If you have any questions about these certificates, please call the chaplaincy department at (612) 813-6253.

**Income tax records**

According to federal and state income tax guidelines, an infant born alive at any gestational age who dies may be claimed as a dependent in that tax year. You may need to furnish a copy of the legal birth certificate with your tax return. A child who is stillborn may not be claimed as a dependent.

Consult your personal tax preparer or the state or federal tax offices for more information.

**When you go home**

Leaving the hospital without your child or being at home without your child can be very painful and difficult. Here are some suggestions to help ease your adjustment:

- Let people know. You may wish to call family and friends to let them know what happened. If that is hard, maybe a family member or friend could make the calls.

- If your baby died, you may want to write a brief announcement. For example, “We sadly announce the birth and death of our very special child (name) on (date).” Information about a service and memorial or tribute gifts also may be included.

- The nursery or bedroom: Well-meaning family and friends may offer to dismantle the room and put your child’s toys and clothing away before you return home. You may find that doing this yourself, in your own time and in your own way, will be much more therapeutic.

- Family, maternity, or paternity leave: You might want to consider taking at least part of your
planned maternity leave. Returning to work right away may not be best. Take time to absorb what has happened to you and your family. Take care of yourself. Take the time that you need. Everyone who grieves has a different timetable.

Talking to your other children about the death

It is important to talk to your other children about the death of their sibling. If you have more than one child, you may want to speak to each of them alone since each will have different levels of understanding, depending on age.

Try to talk in a place where there are few distractions. Talk with your child at eye level. You may want to hold your child. Start by saying, “I have something very sad to tell you.” Go on to explain that his sibling has died. Most children will wonder about these questions:

• Why couldn’t my sibling live? Give a simple, accurate explanation. For example, “She was very sick and the doctor couldn’t fix what wasn’t working.” It is all right to say, “We’re not sure,” if that is the case.

• Did I cause the death? Explain that your child did not cause the death of their sibling. If you know what caused the death, explain it in terms that your child will understand. Try to avoid terms such as “lost” or “taken from us.” Those terms can be scary for a child. If you do not know the cause of death, tell your child that and explain that when you find out you will tell him.

• Is it something I said, did, or thought that caused my sibling to die? It’s very important to address this issue. Children need to be assured that they are not responsible for the death.

• Will I get sick or die, too? Reassure your child about her health and the health of the important people around her. Be careful not to make false promises, such as saying, “I will never leave you.” Instead say, “Most parents live to be old and to see their children grow up. Most children live to be grown-ups and have children of their own. That’s what usually happens and that’s what we expect to happen in our family.”

• Why did this happen to our family? Follow your own values and belief system. Some families believe in a divine plan; others explain that some events in life are beyond our understanding.

• Who will take care of me? Explain that even though you are very sad because your child died, you will continue to care for her. Also explain that there will be times when she might see you cry and be upset. Remind her that it is not her that is making you feel that way. Rather, it is the death of her sibling that is upsetting you. Remind your child that she may feel sad at times, too, and it is okay to have those feelings.

Remind your child to ask questions about anything he does not understand. Explain what it means when someone dies. For example, you might say the person feels no pain, the body doesn’t work anymore, the heart doesn’t beat, or the person doesn’t breathe. Go on to explain your spiritual belief about death.

While children may not ask these questions out loud, they often think about these things. It’s worth the effort to bring them up when you feel the time is right. You know your children best and know what they can handle and understand, and when.
When your children ask questions, answer them the best you can. If you need help talking to your children, a child life specialist from Children’s may be able to help. Call (612) 813-7216.

**Additional things to consider when talking with your child**

Some children may be very upset after the death of a sibling. Others may not express much concern. Young children just may be relieved that their parents are home again. Keep in mind that your child’s grief may not match your own.

A child’s developmental level will impact his reaction to death. Be tolerant of behavior changes in children. Grieving is often shown with behavior as well as with words. For example, some children may act younger than their age, cling to a parent, whine, or be aggressive. Others may experience bedwetting, nightmares, or anger. All of this is normal and usually temporary. If behavior persists or you are concerned, call your child’s doctor, a mental health professional, or a Children’s child life specialist or social worker.

While it is normal to want to protect your children, it is okay to show emotion in front of them. It can be helpful to label your feelings so children can learn to do the same. For example, say, “I’m sad because (name) died.” Encourage children to talk about feelings, to make art projects, or pretend play (role play) to help express themselves.

Just as the death of your child will affect your entire being, so will it affect your other children. You will see that they are grieving by watching their behavior and their bodies. It is not unusual to notice changes in eating and sleeping patterns, physical complaints, and uncommon behavior. After a few weeks, many of these behaviors will occur less often. It is very important to help children be a part of this experience and help them work through and understand the death of their sibling.

**Summary**

Over the next few days, some immediate tasks and decisions will need to be made. Ask for help from people you trust. Grief is a process. In the days, weeks, and months ahead, your grief will continue to unfold and change. As the shock, numbness, and disbelief wears off, you may feel worse because the reality of the death begins to sink in.

Self-care is very important. Family members and friends may not know how to help you or what to do for you. You can help them — and you — by telling them what you need.

You will find that you will be better able to cope with the ups and downs of grief as you move through it and become familiar with its rhythm. There is not a right or wrong way to grieve. It is just important to allow yourself to grieve. Every family member may respond to the death of your child uniquely. Respecting each other’s grieving style will help all of you navigate through this experience together.

**Members of your child’s health care team:**

Unit ________________________________

Phone number ________________________

Doctor ______________________________

Nurse ________________________________

Social worker _________________________

Chaplain ____________________________

Child life specialist ___________________
The first days following the death of a child

Bereavement Services
Comfort and support when a child dies
The first days following the death of a child

We extend our sincere sympathy to you and your family and assure you we will remember your child and your family.

Please use the information in this booklet to help you following the death of your child. We know that this time is very painful and difficult. We can help you and answer many questions you may have.

We hope this information will be helpful to you and your family.

Important telephone numbers:

Social work department
(612) 813-6138, Children’s - Minneapolis
(651) 220-6479, Children’s - St. Paul
(651) 241-2419, United Hospital

Child life department
(612) 813-6259, Children’s - Minneapolis
(651) 220-6465, Children’s - St. Paul

Chaplaincy department
(612) 813-6253, Children’s - Minneapolis
(651) 220-6369, Children’s - St. Paul
(651) 241-8892, United Hospital

Allina perinatal loss support group
(651) 241-6206

Bereavement Services
(612) 813-7216

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Written by
Linda Lehmann, MA, LP
Mary Ratzlaff, LICSW
Caring for your baby’s body

This section refers to pregnancy or infant loss. If your child was older, please see page 4.

At the hospital

After your baby has died, you will be encouraged to see, touch, and hold your baby. While this may seem strange to you, many parents say that this time of saying goodbye becomes a profound family memory and helps them with their grief. If your baby has a physical abnormality, it may look worse in your imagination than it does in real life.

These suggestions may help:

• **Take as much time as you need.** After spending time alone with your child, you may want to invite other family members or friends to see your child. You may bathe your baby, comb her hair, and dress your baby in special clothing. Spend some time talking to, holding, and looking at your baby.

• **Consider naming your baby** if you have not already done so. A name is a very special gift you can give your baby. You may want to use the name you selected for your baby or choose another name that is special. Naming your baby will help you talk more easily about him or her in conversations later and help others realize that your baby was a real person. If you like, a hospital chaplain can guide you in a naming ceremony.

• **Get answers to your questions.** Your health care provider may ask your permission to try to determine the cause of death through genetic testing or an autopsy. While in some cases the cause cannot be determined, you may receive answers to questions. Ask yourself the question, “If I choose to become pregnant again, would the results of an autopsy or genetic test be important to me?”

• **Provide for spiritual support.** You may find it comforting to lean on rituals and prayers that reflect your own faith and beliefs. Your own faith leader or the hospital chaplain can help you.

• **Gather keepsakes.** You may ask staff to assist or provide photos, footprints, and handprints to take with you. You also may take some of your baby’s hospital items if you wish, such as the name band and blanket.

If your child was born alive at any gestational age, or if your baby is 20-week’s gestation or older and stillborn, there are two choices about how to care for your baby’s body. Both choices require the services of a funeral home, mortuary, or cremation society. These choices are:

Burial

• At the funeral home, you may see, hold, wash, and dress your baby before burial. Your faith tradition may have specific rituals or ways of providing care for the body.

• You may choose to have your baby’s body embalmed. This is required if you are transporting your baby’s body to another state or if there is a length of time before a public viewing or visitation.

• Your baby’s body can be buried in a cemetery or placed in an above ground crypt.

• Burial can be done in coordination with services of your faith tradition.
Cremation

- Cremation may be arranged through any funeral home.

- At the funeral home, you may see, hold, wash, and dress your baby before cremation. Your faith tradition may have specific rituals or ways of providing care for the body.

- You may choose to have your baby’s body embalmed, as mentioned above. However, you may still have private family time with your baby prior to cremation without embalming.

- The cremains (ashes) can be buried as above, scattered, or placed.

If your baby is under 20 week’s gestation and stillborn, there are additional options about how to care for the body. You are encouraged to discuss these choices with your social worker:

- **Hospital-arranged cremation:** The body is prepared for cremation and scattered within Forest Lawn Memorial Park, near an area known as the inner pond. This service is free through a special agreement between Children’s and Forest Lawn Memorial Park Association. Under this agreement, the ashes cannot be returned to the family. You are encouraged to discuss this option with your social worker.

- **Memorial monument:** There is a memorial monument at Forest Lawn Memorial Park on which your child’s name can be inscribed for a fee. If you are interested in this option, please contact Forest Lawn Memorial Park Association, (651) 776-6420. They are located at 1800 Edgerton Street, St. Paul.

Remember: Whether you choose burial or cremation, arrangements can be made to care for your baby’s body in a way that honors your beliefs.

**Caring for your child’s body**

This section refers to the loss of children older than infancy. If your child was younger, please see the pregnancy or infant loss section on page 3.

**At the hospital**

After your child has died, you will be encouraged to see, touch, and hold your child. While this may seem strange to you, many parents say that this time of saying goodbye becomes a profound family memory and helps them with their grief.

These suggestions may help:

- **Take as much time as you need.** After spending time alone with your child, you may want to invite other family members or friends to see your child. You may bathe your child, comb their hair, and dress your child in special clothing. Spend some time talking to, cuddling, and looking at your child.

- **Get answers to your questions.** Your health care provider may ask your permission to try to determine the cause of death through an autopsy or if your child is an infant, genetic testing. While in some cases the cause cannot be determined, you may receive answers to some of your questions about your child’s death.

- **Provide for spiritual support.** You may find it comforting to lean on rituals and prayers that reflect your own faith and beliefs. Your own faith leader or the hospital chaplain can help you.
• Gather keepsakes. You may ask staff to assist or provide photos, footprints, and handprints to take with you. You also may take some of your child’s hospital items if you wish, such as the name band, blanket or other momentos.

Remember: Whether you choose burial or cremation, arrangements can be made to care for your child’s body in a way that honors your beliefs.

**Burial**

• At the funeral home, you may see, hold, wash, and dress your child before burial. Your faith tradition may have specific rituals or ways of providing care for the body.

• You may choose to have your child’s body embalmed. This is required if you are transporting your child’s body to another state or if there is a length of time before a public viewing or visitation.

• Your child’s body can be buried in a cemetery or placed in an above ground crypt.

• Burial can be done in coordination with services of your faith tradition.

**Cremation**

• Cremation may be arranged though any funeral home.

• At the funeral home, you may see, hold, wash, and dress your child before burial. Your faith tradition may have specific rituals or ways of providing care for the body.

• You may choose to have your child’s body embalmed, as mentioned above. However, you may still have private family time with your child before cremation without embalming.

• The cremains (ashes) can be buried as above, scattered, or placed.

**Autopsy**

If an autopsy or post-mortem examination is being done, ask Children’s staff whether this would affect your plans for services. While generally it does not, in rare instances it can affect an open casket (viewing of the body in an open casket). You may be able to limit which parts of your child’s body will be examined.

Once the autopsy is performed, the body will be released to the funeral home or crematory.

The results of an autopsy are not usually available for several months. You will be notified when the autopsy is completed and results are available. You may choose to set up a time to meet with your child’s physician to discuss the results. The autopsy may be conducted at Children’s or at the medical examiner’s office. It is helpful to tell your funeral home about this. Your funeral home will be able to provide the same kinds of services to you, wherever the autopsy takes place.

If you have questions about whether to have an autopsy or about how the results may benefit you, talk with your child’s physician or a pathologist before the examination.

Your child’s autopsy will be:

Date ________________________________

Location ___________________________

Phone ______________________________
Selecting a funeral home

You will need to select a funeral home or mortuary to care for your child’s body and help you arrange services. Often, it is helpful to get input from family, friends, and spiritual leaders about your plans.

Things to consider:

• The location of the funeral home, service, or burial and its accessibility for family and friends.

• Recommendations of reputable funeral homes from family, friends, or spiritual leaders.

• Call several funeral homes to ask questions and to help decide which one best meets your needs.

• Costs will vary. You should consider the costs of:
  - Burial or cremation
  - Cemetery plots
  - Other additional costs

• If you want to see your child before the visitation or memorial service, be sure to tell the funeral home staff.

You may choose to contact a funeral home while still at the hospital or when you get home. The hospital does not contact them automatically. The funeral director will set up a time to meet with you at their place of business. The director can help guide you through planning a service, selecting cremation or burial, writing obituaries, and coordinating with spiritual leaders.

Funeral homes that are a distance from the hospital often can arrange for a local funeral home to sign out your child’s body and transport the body to a funeral home in your area. If you have any cultural or religious preferences about transporting the body, please contact the social worker or chaplain.

Note: The Church of Blessed Kateri, (612) 824-7606, will transport deceased American Indian people to destinations within 400 miles.

If you would like to drive your child’s body to the funeral home, a special permit is needed. A funeral home has to come to the hospital to sign out your child’s body. Faxes are not permitted. This is not always possible.

If you know the name of the funeral home before you leave the hospital, tell a staff member who cared for your child, such as a nurse, chaplain, or social worker. If you choose the funeral home after you leave the hospital, call the pathology office, (651) 220-6560. Remember, the hospital does not contact the funeral home.

Name of funeral home, mortuary, or cremation society chosen:

Funeral home name _____________________

_____________________________________

Address ______________________________

Phone number _________________________

Appointment time _____________________
Financial resources

There are financial resources that may be available to help you with funeral costs. The hospital social worker can help you explore your options.

- Contact your county human services department and request information about funeral assistance. Notify your funeral director that you wish to apply for county funeral assistance and they can help you complete necessary paperwork. This contact needs to be made before you make final decisions about arrangements at the funeral home.
- Some funeral homes offer reduced rates for families of young children in financial need.
- Life insurance policies
- Faith communities, civic organizations, and employee assistance funds
- Help from family and friends

Planning the funeral

Following the death of a child at any age, many families find it helpful to plan and share in a memorial ritual or service. This may be part of your own grieving process as well as a tribute to your child.

There is no “right” or “wrong” kind of service. It simply should reflect your child’s life and your family’s faith and love. It will provide a way to express your grief and share strength for the days ahead. Whatever you plan should include cultural and spiritual traditions that are meaningful to you. This may be a small gathering of family or it may be a service open to family, friends, and your community.

Contact your place of worship or your religious leader to begin planning a service and to give spiritual support to you and your family. The hospital chaplain is also available to help you plan a service. In addition, funeral homes have information about people available to lead services.

Some funeral options to consider:

- **Visitation or reviewal.** This is a time for family and friends to gather before a service to view your child’s body and share memories. The casket may be open or closed. There may be a brief prayer service held during this time. Families may choose to bring photos and meaningful items to display.

- **Funeral services.** These can be held at a place of worship or at the funeral home. A casket or urn is present. Caskets may be open or closed. You may have a time of visitation before the service. A brief graveside service is often held after a funeral service for burial of the casket or urn. Urns also can be placed in a crypt.

- **Memorial services.** These can be held at a place of worship, a funeral home, or another location. The casket or urn is not present. The memorial service may be held instead of a funeral service, or it may be held after an extended period of time after the death. It may be held at a later date in addition to an immediate service.

- **Graveside or commitment services.** These are held as the body or cremains are buried or placed. While this service is often held along with a funeral or memorial service, it can be done separately as well.

When planning your child’s service, find ways to make it personal, reflecting the uniqueness of your child’s life and what he or she means to your family. Your family, religious leader, hospital chaplain, and
funeral director can help with resources and ideas. Some families have chosen to include these in the service:

- pictures and collages
- footprints and handprints
- special toys, comforters, or clothes
- involving family in remembrances (readings or leading service, for example) or offerings
- favorite music or readings of your family or child who died
- videos and slides
- favorite toys, awards, or school work

**Birth and death certificates**

**Birth certificates**

If your child is born alive at any gestational age, the hospital will complete a legal birth certificate. If your child is 20-week’s gestation or older and stillborn, no death certificate is issued. However, the hospital will complete a “fetal death certificate,” which is required by the Minnesota Department of Health.

If your child is under 20-week’s gestation and stillborn, no legal birth or death certificate is issued. The Birth Center will provide you with a certificate of recognition (footprint card) to honor the birth of your baby.

A copy of your child’s death certificate may be purchased through the health department or any local registrar. If your child died at United Hospital or Children’s - St. Paul, you also may contact the St. Paul Health Department, 555 Cedar Street, St. Paul, MN 55101, (651) 266-1333.

**Certificates of naming, blessing, and baptism**

If your child received a naming, blessing, or baptism while in the hospital, the certificate will be given to you or mailed to your home. If you have any questions about these certificates, please call the chaplaincy department at Children’s, (612) 813-6253, or United Hospital, (651) 241-8889.

**Income tax records**

According to federal and state income tax guidelines, an infant born alive at any gestational age who dies may be claimed as a dependent in that tax year. You may need to furnish a copy of the legal birth certificate with your tax return. A child who is stillborn may not be claimed as a dependent.
Consult your personal tax preparer or the state or federal tax offices for more information.

**Tributes and memorials**

Some families set up a memorial fund in their child’s name. This can be done at any time and gifts can be used in the manner you choose. Local banks can help you set up memorial accounts.

If you wish memorials to be sent to a specific group or organization, it is best to use their complete name and address in the obituary notice. Your funeral director can guide you in this process.

**When you go home**

Leaving the hospital without your child or being at home without your child can be very painful and difficult. Here are some suggestions to help ease your adjustment:

- Let people know. You may wish to call family and friends to let them know what happened. If that is hard, maybe a family member or friend could make the calls.

- If your baby died, you may want to write a brief announcement. For example, “We sadly announce the birth and death of our very special child (name) on (date).” Information about a service and memorial or tribute gifts also may be included.

- The nursery or bedroom: Well-meaning family and friends may offer to dismantle the room and put your child’s toys and clothing away before you return home. You may find that doing this yourself, in your own time and in your own way, will be much more therapeutic.

- Family, maternity, or paternity leave: You might want to consider taking at least part of your planned maternity leave. Returning to work right away may not be best. Take time to absorb what has happened to you and your family. Take care of yourself. Take the time that you need. Everyone who grieves has a different timetable.

**Talking to your other children about the death**

It is important to talk to your other children about the death of their sibling. If you have more than one child, you may want to speak to each of them alone since each will have different levels of understanding, depending on age.

Try to talk in a place where there are few distractions. Talk with your child at eye level. You may want to hold your child. Start by saying, “I have something very sad to tell you.” Go on to explain that his sibling has died. Most children will wonder about these questions:

- Why couldn’t my sibling live? Give a simple, accurate explanation. For example, “She was very sick and the doctor couldn’t fix what wasn’t working.” It is all right to say, “We’re not sure,” if that is the case.

- Did I cause the death? Explain that your child did not cause the death of the sibling. If you know what caused the death, explain it in terms that your child will understand. Try to avoid terms such as “lost” or “taken from us.” Those terms can be scary for a child. If you do not know the cause of death, tell your child that and explain that when you find out you will tell him.
• Is it something I said, did, or thought that caused my sibling to die? It’s very important to address this issue. Children need to be assured that they are not responsible for the death.

• Will I get sick or die, too? Reassure your child about her health and the health of the important people around her. Be careful not to make false promises, such as saying, “I will never leave you.” Instead say, “Most parents live to be old and to see their children grow up. Most children live to be grown-ups and have children of their own. That’s what usually happens and that’s what we expect to happen in our family.”

• Why did this happen to our family? Follow your own values and belief system. Some families believe in a divine plan; others explain that some events in life are beyond our understanding.

• Who will take care of me? Explain that even though you are very sad because your child died, you will continue to care for her. Also explain that there will be times when she might see you cry and be upset. Remind her that it is not her that is making you feel that way. Rather, it is the death of her sibling that is upsetting you. Remind your child that she may feel sad at times, too, and it is okay to have those feelings.

Remind your child to ask questions about anything he does not understand. Explain what it means when someone dies. For example, you might say the person feels no pain, the body doesn’t work anymore, the heart doesn’t beat, or the person doesn’t breathe.

Go on to explain your spiritual beliefs about death. While children may not ask these questions out loud, they often think about these things. It’s worth the effort to bring them up when you feel the time is right. You know your children best and know what they can handle and understand, and when.

When your children ask questions, answer them the best you can. If you need help talking to your children, a child life specialist from Children’s may be able to help. Call (651) 220-6465.

**Additional things to consider when talking with your child**

Some children may be very upset after the death of a sibling. Others may not express much concern. Young children just may be relieved that their parents are home again. Keep in mind that your child’s grief may not match your own.

A child’s developmental level will impact his reaction to death. Be tolerant of behavior changes in children. Grieving is often shown with behavior as well as with words. For example, some children may act younger than their age, cling to a parent, whine, or be aggressive. Others may experience bedwetting, nightmares, or anger. All of this is normal and usually temporary. If behavior persists or you are concerned, call your child’s doctor, a mental health professional, or a Children’s child life specialist or social worker.

While it is normal to want to protect your children, it is okay to show emotion in front of them.
It can be helpful to label your feelings so children can learn to do the same. For example, say, “I’m sad because (name) died.” Encourage children to talk about feelings, to make art projects, or pretend play (role play) to help express themselves.

Just as the death of your child will affect your entire being, so will it affect your other children. You will see that they are grieving by watching their behavior and their bodies. It is not unusual to notice changes in eating and sleeping patterns, physical complaints, and uncommon behavior. After a few weeks, many of these behaviors will occur less often. It is very important to help children be a part of this experience and help them work through and understand the death of their sibling.

**Summary**

Over the next few days, some immediate tasks and decisions will need to be made. Ask for help from people you trust. Grief is a process. In the days, weeks, and months ahead, your grief will continue to unfold and change. As the shock, numbness, and disbelief wears off, you may feel worse because the reality of the death begins to sink in.

Self-care is very important. Family members and friends may not know how to help you or what to do for you. You can help them – and you – by telling them what you need.

You will find that you will be better able to cope with the ups and downs of grief as you move through it and become familiar with its rhythm. There is not a right or wrong way to grieve. It is just important to allow yourself to grieve. Every family member may respond to the death of your child uniquely. Respecting each other’s grieving style will help all of you to navigate through this experience together.

Members of your child’s health care team:

- **Unit**: ____________________________
- **Phone number**: ____________________________
- **Doctor**: ____________________________
- **Nurse**: ____________________________
- **Social worker**: ____________________________
- **Chaplain**: ____________________________
- **Child life specialist**: ____________________________

For more information, contact Bereavement Services at (612) 813-7216.
Comfort and support when a child dies

Bereavement Services
Comfort and support when a child dies
Comfort and support when a child dies

We extend our sincere sympathy to you and your family and assure you we will remember your child and your family.

Please use the information in this booklet to help you following the death of your child. We know that this time is very painful and difficult. We can help you and answer many questions you may have.

We hope this information will be helpful to you and your family.

Important telephone numbers:

Social work department
(612) 813-6138, Children’s - Minneapolis
(651) 220-6479, Children’s - St. Paul

Child life department
(612) 813-6259, Children’s - Minneapolis
(651) 220-6465, Children’s - St. Paul

Chaplaincy department
(612) 813-6253, Children’s - Minneapolis
(651) 220-6369, Children’s - St. Paul

Bereavement Services
(612) 813-7216

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What is Bereavement services?

Bereavement Services offers bereaved families comprehensive bereavement support after their child has died. The program provides comfort and support to families for the first year and longer.

Below are some of the services offered through Bereavement Services:

- **Bereavement support and follow-up.** Support is given to families at the time of death, with helpful information about grief. Cards are mailed to parents on the child’s birthday and the one-year anniversary to remember the child who died.

- **Family-to-Family program.** This program offers support by parents who have also experienced the death of a child.

- **Grief support groups.** Groups are offered for parents and bereaved siblings, ages 5 to 18 years. Parents may choose between a specific topic or discussion group. The children and teen groups also focus on a specific topic. In addition, a daytime group meets every other week. For more information, visit the Bereavement Services website.

- **Memorial services.** Parents are invited to services of remembrance to honor their children who have died.

- **Special events.** Full- and half-day events are offered for families, parents, and grandparents.

- **Bereavement Services website.** Visit www.childrensmn.org then click on “Clinics and Departments.” This Children’s Web page includes information about grief and Bereavement Services. Also included is a “Tributes” page.

- **Continuing education.** Continuing education around issues related to bereavement is offered to staff to increase awareness and improve care.

Bereavement support is a critical extension of the excellent care to families at Children’s Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota. As one parent remarked,

“You helped us through the most difficult time in our lives. Thank you so much for being there.”

For more information, contact Bereavement Services at (612) 813-7216.
What is the Family-to-Family Program?

When a child dies, the grief that follows can be intense and devastating. As much as family and friends want to understand, it may be difficult for them to grasp the enormity of this life-changing event.

It would seem that it might be helpful for parents to talk to other bereaved parents, those who are further along in their grief process. They may learn that their reactions are normal and expected. This connection can offer hope in the midst of the despair that is often present after the death of a child.

The Family-to-Family program matches parent volunteers with newly bereaved parents to offer them emotional support. Matches may be made on the following criteria:

- age of child at death
- circumstances of child’s death
- surviving siblings
- decision to withdraw life support, if applicable
- family makeup
- culture

When parents request a match, they can indicate which criteria are most important to them.

Once the match is made, the expectation is that the volunteer will be in contact with the parent for at least one year. The volunteer and parent agree upon the amount of contact.

Contact may include:

- phone calls
- e-mail exchanges
- cards sent to parents by volunteers
- regular mail exchanges
- in-person visits, for example meeting for coffee
- visits to the child’s gravesite

To request a Family-to-Family volunteer, call Bereavement Services at (612) 813-7216.
When asked about what was helpful, parents who received support from Family-to-Family volunteers had these comments:

- Being able to “discuss a wide range of issues associated with our grief”

- The “trust and friendship.” The volunteer was the “one person who hasn’t judged my feelings.” We “helped each other heal in ways someone who has never lost a child couldn’t.”

- “She affirmed all my feelings and reactions as normal and shared her own when appropriate. This helped me identify my feelings and feel that I was normal and not alone.”

- “Nice to have someone to connect with and not feel so alone”

- “My husband and I grieved very differently. I wanted to talk; he didn’t. There was a lot of tension building up. Talking with my volunteer gave me an outlet, which helped to ease the tension between my husband and myself.”

- “I needed someone outside my home to talk to. In this new life where ‘normal’ has been redefined, it was comforting to talk to someone who was/is also a grieving parent. How much easier it would have been to shut myself out of this world (isolate myself). For me, I needed the human contact.”

- “My volunteer and I have remarkable parallels in terms of family composition, including the brief lives of our third baby. Because of her experience in balancing grief with raising two other children, she was able to lend wisdom and perspective.”
Notes