



UNDERSTANDING A GRANDPARENT'S GRIEF



The relationship between a grandparent and a grandchild is very special and unique. When a grandchild dies, a grandparent's grief is intense and painful. It leaves bereaved grandparents feeling helpless as they experience a double loss. Not only do they mourn for their grandchild, but they also grieve for their child and their inability to take away the pain their child is experiencing as a bereaved parent. The death of a grandchild is not something a grandparent ever expected to experience, and because of this, many grandparents experience a sense of denial, shock, or even numbness.

GRANDPARENTS GRIEF FOR THEIR ADULT CHILD AND THEIR GRANDCHILD

It can be challenging for grandparents to express their own grief when they are worried about the health of their adult child and other family members. Because of this, many Grandparents may direct their energy toward caring for their adult child rather than addressing their own grief or need for care. This sometimes leads to a sense of helplessness and fear that in addition to the death of their grandchild, they may also lose their adult child. This can be an overwhelming experience for them and sometimes can be overwhelming to their adult child, who may or may not want the added attention of their parent. Be patient with grandparents as they are working through these experiences and validate their feelings and concerns.

GRANDPARENTS GRIEVE WITHIN A FAMILY CONTEXT

Grief can affect the family dynamic, as everyone processes their grief at different paces and in different ways. Each grandparent had their own relationship with their grandchild and will likely have their own way of grieving. At



the same time, a grandparent's grief is impacted by the grief of others within the family context. Grandparents often feel the need to take care of everyone else and, sometimes, this results in grandparents ignoring their own self-care. This can take a toll on their own mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health. Communication, understanding, and patience with grandparents and their families are critical as they grieve separately and together at the same time.

GRANDPARENTS MAY STRUGGLE WITH BEING ALIVE WHEN THEIR GRANDCHILD HAS DIED

Grandparents expect that their grandchild will outlive them. As a result, many grandparents may say, "I wish it had been me who died instead of my grandchild." Or, they might think, I am not supposed to be around to see this. It is helpful to allow grandparents to have their own feelings about this. Be supportive and patient with them as they express this part of their grief. In addition to these feelings, they are also experiencing the depth of pain over the loss as are other members of the family. They may struggle with hopelessness, anger, guilt, or other intense reactions to their loss, while also wrestling with questions of why this has happened to their grandchild. Validate these experiences with grandparents and acknowledge the heavy burden they carry after the death of a grandchild.



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