

Northwest Infant Survival & SIDS Alliance



NISSA

Supporting families & promoting safe sleep

*Taking Care
of Yourself*

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

In caring for ourselves we need to identify those activities which are healing to us, as well as those areas that may hinder our healing, and cope with each appropriately.

- Give yourself permission, time and space to grieve.
- Don't pretend that death doesn't hurt.
- Feel free to protest the "why" of death.
- Don't judge your level of grief and healing by how others are grieving and healing, but by your own internal awareness.
- Understand and accept your limitations.
- Respect your spouse's timetable and method of grieving.
- Don't escape into loneliness.
- Get rid of imagined guilt and "if only's."
- Confront the fears of your own death and the death of other loved ones.
- Allow yourself to cry and anticipate tears at unexpected times.
- Honestly express your feelings about this death to people who will understand and not be judgmental, and who will not be hurt by your honest expression of feelings.
- Recognize that seeking professional counseling doesn't mean you are weak, inadequate, or crazy.
- Use religion, philosophy, poetry, music, art, gardening, tennis, walks at nature centers, reading, or volunteering work to gain relief and understanding.
- Talk about your experience to friends who were and were not involved with the death.
- Accept your friends with all their imperfections and occasional bad advice; you, too, have your moments of imperfection.
- Tell others what you want from them: help, emotional support, time for sharing.
- Continue to participate in activities that are fun for you and with people who are special to you. Don't underestimate the effects of small pleasures.
- Recognize that you may not always want to talk about your baby; sometimes there is great relief being where no one knows you've lost a child.
- Eat nutritionally. Consider using a vitamin supplement.
- Not crying doesn't mean you don't remember.
- It is fine to either enjoy being around other people's babies, or to be uncomfortable.

- Exercise to improve sleep.
- Set small goals.
- Accept others' verbal, non-verbal and physical expressions of caring for you.
- Postpone major decisions, such as selling your home or changing jobs.
- The decision whether or not to have another child is yours alone.
- The question, "How many children do you have?" is a difficult one, and you may find yourself answering it in a manner which best fits the situation and/or your own needs at the time.
- Take a break from intensity and exposure to pain.
- Consider participating in support groups; grief shared can be grief diminished.
- Avoid masking pain with drugs or alcohol.
- Give yourself permission to backslide.
- Realize that you cannot prevent, cure, or skip the grief process. The only way out is through.

The following are natural and normal reactions that most parents experience:

- Feel physically exhausted. Have difficulty getting to sleep or finding a reason to get up.
- Feel tightness in throat, heaviness in chest, or a lump in the stomach that turns over like a rock.
- Wander aimlessly, forget in the middle of a sentence, neglect to finish tasks. Feel restless, look for activity, but can't concentrate.
- Think you are losing your mind.
- Feel you don't want to go on.
- Sense the baby's presence, hear him or her cry or coo.
- Look for the baby in a crowd or see reminders unexpectedly.
- Need to tell and retell and remember things about the baby and the experience of death.
- Feeling able to cope and then falling back again – a see-saw type of reaction

This is a compilation of excerpts by the following and reprinted with permission:

"Caring for the Caregiver," Barbra Swenson, RN, MS, PNP, Seattle, WA

"Ten Guidelines for Dealing with Grief," TCF, Austin, TX

"Parent Contact Workshop," Washington State Chapter, NSIDSF

"General Comments," Ruth Eiseman, TCF, Louisville, KY

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