

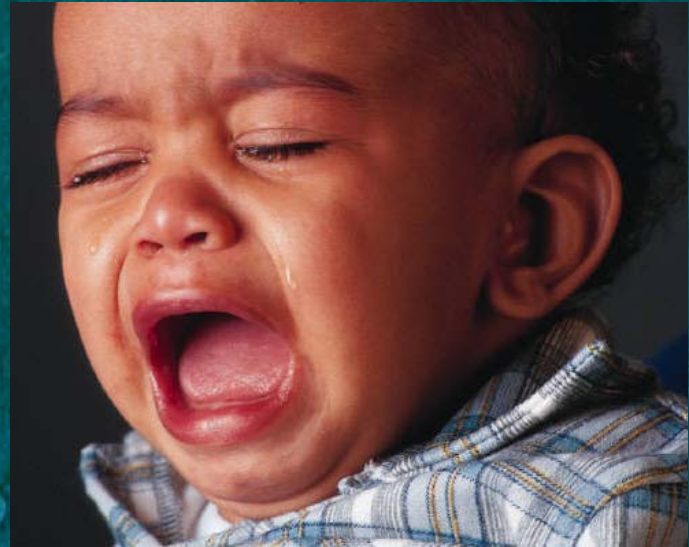
Responding with Compassion and Care to the Death of an Infant or Child



Presented to
First Responders
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Allow for feelings

Feelings are feelings.
We experience
them. They are
sometimes very
unpredictable.
They come and go.
They are part of
the normal
experience of
grief.



Normal Grief Reactions

Is there a right way to grieve?

Why do I feel out of control?

I'm so glad it's over.

I never knew it would hurt so bad!

I feel so relieved.

I FEEL AS IF IT ISN'T REAL

Normal Grief Reactions (cont.)

I feel a tightness in my throat and a heaviness in my chest.

My mood changes over the slightest things.

What is there left for me to live for?

Sometimes I feel ANGRY.

I cry at unexpected times.

I don't want others to see me when I feel sad.

I CAN'T CONCENTRATE.

Normal Grief Reactions (cont.)

I sense my loved one's presence, like hearing their voice.

I feel like my mind is on a Merry-Go-Round that will not stop.

I have trouble sleeping.

I don't feel hungry.

I'm eating all the time.

I have an empty feeling.

I miss being touched.

I miss having someone help me make decisions.

I'm so lonely.

No words can express the impact a first responder can have in a crisis situation.

When responding to an emergency situation involving the death of a child, the scene is likely to be emotionally charged. Parents are often confused and disoriented. Some may express anger and blame; though it may be misplaced. Often times, just listening to a parent express these emotions is helpful.

No words can express... (cont.)

Offering a kind word and gentle helping hand is comforting for parents. Knowing how to handle the circumstances in a compassionate, yet professional manner remains of paramount importance to families.

by Joanne Cacciatore, President of the MISS Foundation

*Rational behavior doesn't
come easy.....*

So don't expect parents to be logical or objective when their child has died.

Runaway emotions make it difficult to think clearly. Instead, allow them to express their feelings by being a good listener, maintaining clear eye contact, speaking firmly, gently, and precisely and giving honest answers to their concerns.

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Counselor, Founder of MISS*

*Letting go is tremendously
painful...*

In crisis situations, when logic and reasoning are diminutive, encourage the parents to do what they do best- what is the most natural behavior. Allow parents to "parent" their child. It is their greatest responsibility and most innate desire.

*Letting go is tremendously
painful... (cont.)*

They need to participate in their child's care and be with their child as much as possible. The chance to say goodbye one last time is of critical importance to most families.

*Letting go is tremendously
painful... (cont.)*

In a recent survey conducted by the MISS Foundation, more than 75% of families who chose not to hold their child after he or she died, later regretted that decision. Most families should be encouraged to see and hold their child, if circumstances allow.

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Founder of MISS*

Understanding the impact of surprise...

Prepare the family (parents, grandparents and siblings) for what they will see-before they see it! Explain any machines, tubes, needles or other equipment if the child is still living. If the child has died, prepare them by explaining the natural postmortem process and why the child's body may look different. Try to avoid complicated terminology or medical vernacular.

Understanding the impact of surprise... (cont.)

Encourage them to ask questions. In the case of sudden death, lividity should be explained with compassion. Pooling blood can be mistaken for bruising and may frighten parents. Honest communication about the physiological changes which have occurred will alleviate some of the trauma factor and perhaps assuage some of the parents' fears.

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Maintaining good communication...

Two things which concern parents most about their child's death are pain and fear. Often they are afraid to ask questions about the pain or fear their child may be having or may have gone through prior to their death, so offer some answers to them as honestly, and gently as possible. Let them know you believe their child has died peacefully and without pain, if this is truly the case.

Maintaining good communication...
(cont.)

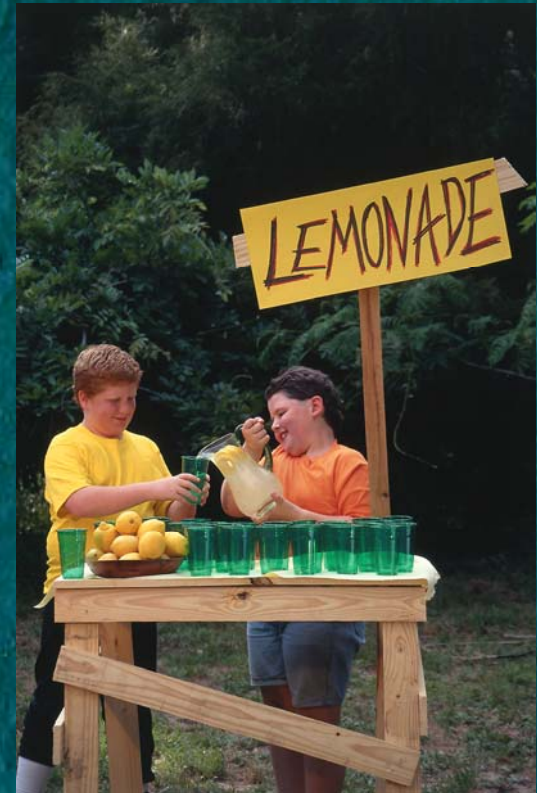
Always tell parents the truth. Remember that good communication requires trust, and trust can only be achieved through honesty. Tell them everything you know about their child's condition or cause of death. Information helps families feel in control of a situation, which otherwise, is out of their control.

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Lemonade out of lemons...

The ultimate no-no is the use of platitudes or clichés! Do not rationalize a child's death. No matter what the physical condition of the child or how much of a "burden" the child would have been, most parents would still prefer to have their child with them under any circumstances.

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SELF CARE

Help others by taking care of
yourself!

Physical Responses to Grief

- HOLLOWNESS IN STOMACH
- TIGHTNESS IN CHEST
- HEART PALPITATIONS
- OVER SENSITIVITY TO NOISE
- BREATHLESSNESS
- WEAKNESS AND/OR TENSION
- LACK OF ENERGY OF STRENGTH

Physical Responses to Grief (cont.)

- DRY MOUTH
- GASTROINTESTINAL DISTURBANCES
- LOSS OF SEXUAL DESIRE
- WEIGHT GAIN OR LOSS
- EXHAUSTION
- TENSION IN THROAT
- VULNERABILITY TO ILLNESS
- RESTLESSNESS

Critical Incident Stress & Grief Reactions

You have experienced a traumatic event or death that may cause unusually strong emotional reactions that have the potential to interfere with your ability to function normally. Even though the event or death may be over, you may now be experiencing or may experience later, some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through such an event.

Critical Incident Stress & Grief Reactions (cont.)

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the traumatic event. Sometimes they may appear a few hours or a few days later. And, in some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

Critical Incident Stress & Grief Reactions (cont.)

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks, or longer, depending on the severity of the traumatic event. The understanding and the support of loved ones usually causes the stress reaction to pass more quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance may be necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It simply indicates that the particular event was just too powerful for the person to manage alone.

Some Things to Try

1. WITHIN THE FIRST 24-48 HOURS periods of appropriate physical exercise, alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
2. Structure your time - keep busy.
3. You're normal and having normal reactions - don't label yourself crazy.
4. Talk to people - talk is the most healing medicine.

Some Things to Try (cont.)

5. Be aware of numbing the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol; you don't need to complicate this with a substance abuse problem.
6. Reach out - people do care.
7. Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
8. Spend time with others.
9. Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.

Some Things to Try (cont.)

10. Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
11. Keep a journal; write your way through those sleepless hours.
12. Do things that feel good to you.
13. Realize those around you are also under stress.

Some Things to Try (cont.)

14. Don't make any big life changes.
15. Do make as many daily decisions as possible which will give you a feeling of control over your life, i.e.: if someone asks you what you want to eat - answer them even if you're not sure.
16. Get plenty of rest.

Some Things to Try (cont.)

17. Recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal - don't try to fight them - they'll decrease over time and become less painful.
18. Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).

You have a hard job to do...

So, above all treat yourself
with kindness

and

give yourself an abundance of
grace.