



Foot Prints on Our Hearts

There is a quote that says, “ When your parents dies you lose your past, when your spouse dies you lose your present and when your child dies you lose your future”.

Children are not supposed to die before their parents. It does not fit in with our sense of life order. Children should out live us. They should be our legacy, carryon our family values and traditions, tell family stories, share memories of us with our grandchildren.

But children do die before us. They die as infants, small children, teens and adults. They die suddenly and after illnesses. They die quietly and they die violently. They die with us near them and they die away from us. And when a child dies a part of us, as their parent, dies with them.

That part of our heart that dies with our child is permanent. It does not come back to life. We, as their parents, walk through the rest of our life with a void that cannot be filled. We have memories that don't go away. We have love for our child that does not end. Yet we are expected to go on living, to work and socialize, to be happy and cheerful.

How do we learn to continue our lives without the child we love and miss so intensely? What can we do to find peace in our hearts and honor our child? We offer these thoughts.

- 1) **Take Care of Yourself:** It is important to take care of ourselves. We need to eat balanced meals, get adequate sleep and exercise regularly. This is very challenging when we are in such deep emotional pain. Finding a companion to share activities and establishing routines helps us care for ourselves.
- 2) **Educate yourself:** Grief has no timeline. You will always grieve the death of your child. You will always miss them. You will continue to think about them and wonder about how their life might have been different. This is normal. Educate yourself about grief and the grieving process. If you are comfortable with a group setting then join a support group or “Compassionate Friends” (a national parent peer group). Don't be afraid to seek help with your grieving. Be patient with yourself and others.
- 3) **Talk About your Child:** Talk about your child with those who knew and loved your child; family, friends. Keep pictures of your child around you. Share memories and stories. Name your child if they died before birth. Include your child in the count of your children. They are still and always will be your child.

- 4) **Share Interests:** Engage in the activities your child enjoyed. Share those activities with those who knew your child. Share activities in your child's memory with children's groups or groups with similar interests.

- 5) **Create a Legacy:** Create a legacy for your child. Make a donation of time, talents or "treasures" that perpetuates your child's life. This might be a one-time event or an annual event. Families have donated rocking chairs to hospital nurseries, started scholarship funds, provided fundraisers for specific causes, started a non-profit agency to address a need, created a special event, plant flowers. Don't let perceived limitations stop you from celebrating your child's life in a way meaningful to you.

- 6) **Accept the Change:** The death of your child has changed you. You are not the same person you were. You have experienced a pain like no other. To quote one father: "I have gone to the gates of hell and back". You are a different person than you were; wiser, more insightful with a unique perception of the world. Learn to accept the insight and change your experience has provided to help others. In doing so you will find healing for yourself.

"Those we have held in our arms for a little while we hold in our hearts forever"