

WHO AM I NOW?

Understanding ourselves after the death of a child

“There is something you must always remember; you are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem and smarter than you think.” —Winnie the Pooh

Being a mom or dad starts with living with, caring for and deeply loving a child. When a child dies, parents often understandably struggle with the question: “Who am I now?” It does not matter how long your child lived; once you have crossed the bridge to parenthood, no matter how long the journey, you are always a parent. You are forever changed as a person. Whether your children are living or not, they will always be your children and you their parent.

When a child becomes a part of our lives, we define that life differently. We see ourselves and often the world with new lenses. Being a parent is not just a title; it is a working way of life. It takes constant energy, thought, compassion and compromise. We can define ourselves as good parents, bad parents, fun parents, mean parents, perfect parents, strong parents, or weak parents. Reality is that we have good moments, bad times, perfect days, strength and weakness. And every parent makes mistakes.

After a child dies and is gone, the black hole left feels like an empty soul. All the energy has disappeared and it is very dark and cold. We struggle with our own identity and place in the world. We would do anything to have even the bad days back if it meant one more moment with our child.

Out of the darkness, points of light hopefully emerge. You may have other children at home who need your love and attention—more now than ever. You may have a partner who needs your support, as well. You may have parents who need their child’s love while dealing with the death of a grandchild. There is definitely a world out there that needs your presence, your energy, your light and life.

It may be hard to know how to deal with the world out there. Strangers may innocently ask, “How many children do you have?” Family may not know what to say or do. Friends may give unwarranted advice. Other parents don’t seem to understand your pain at all. When at a loss for words, remember it is always your choice regarding how much you want to share and what you want to keep private. The following may help with some answers to common questions.

“How many children do you have?”

“Thank you for asking, this is hard to answer, I have (#) children, one less after our daughter (or son) _____ died.”



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“Maybe you should...”

“Thank you for thinking of us and trying to help. Right now we are going to do this: _____. We are doing the best we can.”

Our lives can easily be defined by our children and our role as a parent. Who are you now that your child has died? You are still a parent; a grieving parent. Your child will always be a part of you and your family. Your daily role may have changed. The makeup of your family has been forever altered, but one thing that remains a constant is that you are still and will always be a parent.

—C. Caryn Kondo, MSW



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