

Have You Ever Wondered...



...why each year we celebrate the birthdays of presidents who both died more than 100 years ago, but if I want to celebrate the birthday of my little girl who died, people think I "lost it"?

...why each year we remember the anniversaries of the deaths of President Kennedy, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. and Elvis Presley, but most people want me to forget the anniversary of my little girl's death?

Most of us had never before experienced the sudden unexpected death of loved ones who were healthy and had many years of life ahead. With their death, we became a part of a special group of grieving individuals and families. Joining was not by choice and we hope no one else becomes a member.

People treat us differently now as though we have a disease. They may avoid us or advise us to put the past behind us. They may avoid talking about our loved ones who died, almost as if they never lived. They want us to be who we were before the death, though we many never be the same person again. We are different because of their death, not necessarily better or worse, but different. Most of us can, however, learn to live without our loved ones by integrating their loss into our lives and developing a different kind of relationship with them

William Worden (*Grief Counseling & Grief Therapy*, Springer Publishing Co., 1991) talks about the tasks of mourning – the things we need to do as we journey through the grief process. By actively participating in our grief, we may gain some control in our lives and we may find some meaning in our loss. Worden's tasks include: **to accept the reality of the loss** – not today, not tomorrow, but in your time, in your way; **to work through the pain of grief** – as you can, in little bits and pieces if necessary; **to adjust to an environment in which your child is missing** – learning to live without your loved one, but not necessarily without all the physical things (you may need to keep a favorite shirt, stuffed animals or many other things); and **to emotionally relocate your child and move on with life** – you can continue to have a relationship with your loved ones. They are not present physically but you can continue to make them a part of your life.

After all, don't we celebrate George's and Abe's birthdays each year?

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For Grandparents: Grandparent Grief

I am powerlessness. I am helplessness. I am frustration.
I sit with her and I cry with her.
She cries for her daughter and I cry for mine.
I can't help her.
I can't reach inside her and take her broken heart.
I must watch her suffer day after day.
I listen to her tell me over and over how she misses Emily, how she wants her back.
I can't bring Emily back for her.
I can't buy her an even better Emily than she had.
Like I could buy her an even better toy when she was a child.
I can't kiss the hurt and make it go away.
I can't even kiss a small part of it away.
There's no band-aid large enough to cover her bleeding heart.
There was a time I could listen to her talk about a fickle boyfriend
And tell her it would be okay, and know in my heart
That in two weeks she wouldn't even think of him.
Can I tell her it'll be okay in two years when I know it will be okay,
That she will carry this pain of "what might have been" In her deepest heart for the rest of her life?
I see this young woman, my child, who was once carefree and fun-loving and bubbling with life, slumped in a chair with her eyes full of agony.
Where is my power now? Where is my mother's bag of tricks that will make it all better?
Why can't I join her in the aloneness of her grief?
As tight as my arms wrap around her, I can't reach that aloneness.
What can I give her to make her better?
A cold, wet cloth will ease the swelling of her crying eyes, but it won't stop the reason for her tears.
What treat will bring joy back to her? What prize will bring that happy child back?
Where are the magic words to give her comfort?
What chapter in Dr. Spock tells me how to do this?
He has told me everything else I've needed to know.
Where are the answers? I should have them. I'm the mother.
I know that someday she'll find happiness again, that her life will have meaning again.
I can hold out hope for her someday, but what about now? This minute? This hour? This day?
I can give her my love and my prayers and my care and my concern. I could give her my life. But even that won't help.

By Margaret H. Gerner, MSW
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