



FROM A CHILDCARE PROVIDER'S POINT OF VIEW . . . HOW SIDS AFFECTED ME

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This is a story written by one of California's licensed childcare providers. She has been providing care to infants and children in her home for almost 20 years, and is a wife and mother. Nothing in her life prepared her for that August day in 1984 when a baby she was caring for died during his morning nap.

I'm telling my story, really my family's story, because there are so many babies in childcare and there are going to be other people like us who will face this trauma. Most of us work in our neighborhoods and are really isolated from other care givers. Having to face death and grief on your own, without information, without help, and without someone to talk with is so hard.

I need to believe that there was no suffering for Benjamin. But there was intense emotional suffering for everyone close to him. The bond we felt for this baby was strong, because we were his family too.

Nothing seemed different on the day he died. The morning went well and he cuddled up and went right to sleep after his morning bottle. Near lunch time I went to check on him for the third time during his nap. I knew immediately that something was wrong. I could feel it when I looked at him, and picking him up told me the worst had happened.

The next pictures in my mind are like a movie that runs over and over in my head. Calling the paramedics. Doing CPR. Watching the ambulance leave with the baby. Calling his parents. Watching my daughter's terrified face as she kept the other children busy.

Hours went by and the first call I got was from the coroner. He asked some basic questions and then told me about Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. My mind heard and understood the words. My emotions could not really understand and I felt shocked and confused.

Then I made phone calls to my licensing worker and insurance company. What would they believe? I was fortunate because both of these agencies knew about SIDS and told me again that I was not to blame. Hearing it helped me some, but mostly I wished I could talk to another childcare provider. I felt so awful and so unable to do the work that I had always loved.

I was so overprotective and on the alert that I became exhausted. I didn't sleep well. I couldn't concentrate. I had nightmares. My own children seemed sad and depressed. My marriage began to falter since my husband and I each grieved differently. I questioned my abilities as a mother, as a person, and as a childcare provider.

Months went by and I continued to look for things to read and someone to talk with who would really understand. I was fortunate because someone finally found me, or maybe I found her. Some details are still lost in the cloud of grief that followed me in those early months.

What I do remember is a long talk one night in my home. The SIDS peer contact came and described some of the impacts and effects of grief. Suddenly I was not alone. The information, compassion and resources she gave me were my lifelines to recovery. I shared that knowledge and insight with my family and we began to recover.

Two more phone calls stand out in my mind. One is the call I made to another childcare provider in Orange County. She really knew what I had experienced because she had lived the same nightmare. It was such a sense of relief for me to talk with her. The second call was in December 1985. Benjamin's parents called me to share the news of the birth of their daughter, and asked me to be her childcare provider.

It has been hard to come to terms with the death of that little boy and the impact of grief on me and my family. We can look back now and see our growth and feel proud of our recovery. The need to share the experience, and to build resources and support systems for other bereaved childcare providers and families has become very important to me. I often wonder what would have happened if no one had taken the time to care about me and my family.

A group of childcare providers has developed in response to a growing need in California to reach people as quickly as possible. A pamphlet is available which addresses key concerns and issues for those of us who are childcare providers. Telephone support is available. The death of a child touches everyone who shared the child's life, and no one should be excluded from help. All of us grieve and all of us feel responsible. The best way that I know of to find peace of mind and recover, is through information and support.



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