

SIDS GRIEF PROCESS

Introduction

When your baby dies, it is a devastating, disorienting event. The grief that follows is intense and seemingly endless. Below is an outline of the grief stages. Every SIDS parent experiences these emotions at varying times and in varying degrees. The grief stages may appear in any order, not just the way they are presented here. These stages may overlap and they may recur.

GRIEF STAGES

Shock (Disbelief)

- You may ask, “How can a baby who was checked only yesterday by their pediatrician or moments before by his/her parent suddenly be found dead in the crib?”
- Infants don’t just die, there needs to be a reason. In most cases of death, the cause is apparent.
- Yet as a SIDS parent you are asked to accept the fact that something unpredictable, unpreventable killed your baby. Although this disease has been around since antiquity, SIDS is the number one killer of infants in the United States in the first year of life. We only know what it ISN’T, not what it is.

Numbness

- After shock, a kind of numbness sets in, both mentally and physically. Life seems to drain out of your body and mind and you go through the motions of functioning.
- Past pleasures and activities cannot distract you from the ever-present hurt.
- Unrealistic fears for members of your family as well as your own personal safety set in.
- You may develop psychosomatic symptoms of illness along with fitful sleep patterns, loss or excessive weight gain, severe depressions causing you to question your sanity.

Release of Grief and Guilt

- You may be like some people for whom the actual giving into anger, frustration, guilt and the physical act of grieving (crying), may not come for weeks or months following your baby’s death.
- It is then that pent up pressure finally breaks through the “release valves” of the psyche and it is then that you, as a grieving parent, need to get it all out by talking.
- It is at this stage that you must find your own special way of coping by seeking counseling from a clinical psychologist-marriage counselor, a minister or priest, your family pediatrician or doctor, a member of your family, a friend, or another SIDS parent who can reassure you that you are not losing your mind.



Dealing with Reality and Fantasy

- By this stage you finally begin to accept the fact that your baby's death is unchangeable and there will never again be another baby just like the one you lost.
- You will begin to realize that only you can pull yourself out of the pit of despair and that you must actively seek therapeutic means of mending your shattered spirit and personal life.
- It is during this stage that you will begin to think about a subsequent child, a job outside the home or perhaps work with a local SIDS parent group.

Dealing with Memories

- Then about a year later, there comes a period when you realize that it has been weeks since you last cried or were depressed by revived memories of your lost baby and that these relief periods are growing longer and longer in duration.
- You will now be able to talk objectively about your personal grief and your lost baby.
- This is not to say that there will not be moments of "relapse" but the periods of respite get longer and your memories of your baby become more realistic, less tinged with sadness, bitterness or glorification.

Becoming a New Person

- Suffering strengthens and changes a person.
- Hopefully this change will be for the better and not a change that has crippled your emotions and personal life permanently.
- It is not how fast you mend but how well you mend that counts. Generally it takes a SIDS parent a year to recover from the shock of their loss and about 90 percent of all SIDS parents seek professional help somewhere along the line.



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California SIDS Program
3164 Gold Camp Drive, Suite 220
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670-6052
916-266-SIDS (7437) • 800-369-SIDS (7437) • Fax 916-266-7439
info@californiasids.com • www.californiasids.com