



Helping Couples Cope

—by Darla Harmon

I wanted to shout at my husband, “You don’t hurt like I do!” It seemed to me that he wasn’t hurting because he held his feelings inside. I was angry and wanted to say something mean, so I could see the pain in his eyes like the pain I felt in my heart. Luckily, I didn’t say it.

There were few things that threaten the well being of a marriage like the loss of a child. The deep sadness, self doubt, anger and lack of control are difficult to deal with, and greatly impair our ability to be a good spouse. It is common knowledge that men and women cope with emotions in different ways, but we must also consider that people grieve according to their personality. Quiet people will grieve quietly and outspoken people will find comfort in talking. But there is much more to a personality than being quiet or talkative, and all of those things will come into play during grief. I remember feeling close to my husband soon after our daughter, Rachel died, but then a few months later it seemed like we went in different directions. My husband had to keep busy as a way to cope with his grief and I was physically and emotionally exhausted, and sleeping seemed like the only escape. We both had to find ways to help ourselves, and communicate with each other about what we needed.

How do you hold your marriage together during this difficult time and be sensitive to your spouse? Here are a few things that may help:

- Allow each other to find and do what helps make them feel better. You don’t have to grieve in the same way.
- Acknowledge that you are both hurting very deeply although it may be outwardly hard to see.
- Realize that you can’t remove your spouse’s grief or fix all of the problems. It is a process you will both have to work through.
- Tell each other, friends and family what helps you. People don’t instinctively know how to help you. It is OK to ask for help or comfort.
- Come up with a “code word” to signal your spouse that you are having a bad day and struggling with your grief. It is helpful for your spouse to know when you are apt to cry or anger at the least little thing due to grief. Try to recognize when this is happening and use your code word. For example, if you are feeling especially upset or irritated, tell your spouse “I am having a baby day”. They will know what is truly wrong and do their best to make things easier for you. This is also helpful when you are out somewhere together and one of you desperately needs to get away from a situation to keep from falling apart. Working as a team benefits you both.
- Express your current limitations. If you are wary of being a listening ear, or you just can’t attend church or a family gathering, be honest yet gentle.
- Be aware that your family is grieving also. They may not act as you would expect or may do something hurtful, but they are grieving and unsure of what to do.
- Seek support together and apart. Reach out to friends or family or to someone new that can help you. Attend a support group. Hearing stories of other parents helps to ease your pain. You won’t feel so alone and other parents genuinely want to meet you and be of support to you.
- Realize that it is OK to be angry. This is a common feeling. We don’t understand how this could happen to us and it seems so unfair.
- Remember that you were a couple to start with, and the dear child you lost, was born out of that love. Be sure to nurture each other and your relationship. You both need it now more than ever.