

SIDS GRIEF PROCESS

Introduction

When a 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)

- A SIDS parent may ask, “How can my baby who was checked only yesterday by her pediatrician or moments before by me, 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 the SIDS parent is asked to accept the fact that something unpredictable, unpreventable killed their infant. 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 into the parent, both mentally and physically. Life seems to drain out of the body and mind and one goes through the motions of functioning.
- Past pleasures and activities cannot distract the parent from the ever-present hurt.
- Unrealistic fears for members of the family as well as one’s own personal safety set in.
- Psychosomatic symptoms of illness may develop along with fitful sleep patterns, loss or excessive weight gain, severe depressions causing one to question one’s sanity.

Release of Grief and Guilt

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



Dealing with Reality and Fantasy

- By this stage the parent finally begins to accept the fact that their infant's death is unchangeable and that never again will there be another baby just like the one they lost.
- Parents begin to realize that only they themselves can pull themselves out of the pit of despair and that they must actively seek therapeutic means of mending their shattered spirit and personal life.
- It is during this stage that one begins 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 the SIDS parent will realize that it has been weeks since they last cried or were depressed by revived memories of their lost baby and that these relief periods are growing longer and longer in duration.
- Parents are now able to talk objectively about their personal grief and their lost baby.
- This is not to say that there will not be moments of "relapse" but the periods of respite get longer and the memories of their 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 a family's emotions and personal life permanently.
- It is not how fast one mends but how well one mends that counts. Generally it takes the 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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