



It is consistent throughout the literature on grief work, that the death of a child is recognised as the most severe, enduring and debilitating form of bereavement within the context of human relationships.

The death of a child is always unexpected. No parent ever thinks they could outlive their children. No parent ever expects it will happen to them. Regardless of the cause of death, most parents feel some responsibility – they weren't able to protect their child, save their child, prevent their death, keep them safe. For all of these reasons, learning to live with the death of your child is a complex experience for parents.

For friends and relatives, there is a shared sadness which is often coupled with the anxiety of not knowing what to say. Most people want to say something comforting and uplifting, but this is probably not the time to find answers to explain why this has happened or to offer 'quick fix' statements aimed to cheer them up.

Parents can be hurt by well-meaning comments that do not reflect what they are actually thinking and feeling.

“People touch our lives if only for a moment, and yet we're not the same from that moment on - The time is not important, the moment is forever.”

PLEASE DON'T SAY...

PLEASE DON'T SAY *“Maybe it was nature's way.”* I'm trying to understand why this happened. All your answers and theories just add to my confusion and it doesn't make the question *“Why me?”* any easier to bear.

PLEASE DON'T SAY *“You can have more children.”* I wanted this one. I had plans, hopes and dreams for this child. Even if I have more children, this one will always count in my life.

PLEASE DON'T SAY *“At least you have your other children.”* I know I have other children and I'm very grateful. But I wanted this one too. Regardless of how many children I have, this one will always matter too.

PLEASE DON'T SAY *“It would have been worse if it were an older child.”* For me, right now, this is the worst thing that could happen. Never in my wildest dreams did I expect any of my children to die at any age.

PLEASE DON'T SAY *“How is your wife doing?”* without asking about me. Fathers have feelings too. Don't be fooled because we are trying to be strong. Look underneath, fathers hurt too.

Parents are best helped by people who let them share their grief, their memories and stories of their child and stay available over time as they attempt to make sense of this and find meaning in life again.