



GLEYM MÉR EI

# WHEN JOY TURNS TO SORROW

WORDS OF ADVICE  
TO FAMILY AND  
FRIENDS

**Remember that grief is a personal journey.**

**No two people grieve the same way.**

While some have a great need to talk about their loss, feelings and experiences, sometimes again and again, others tend to carry their sorrow in silence for the most part. Some need to continue with their routines in daily life, work, school or other activities as soon as possible, while others need more time. At the same time some parents would like to try to get pregnant again, others would prefer to wait a while longer before trying again.

**Trust that the parents will take the best path for themselves.**

If you are worried that the parents are not taking the right path in their grieving and are possibly experiencing problems that they are not capable of solving themselves, talk to them. Tell them about your thoughts and listen to their feelings. If your concerns are well-founded, you can try to support them and even help them to seek assistance.

**Remember that it is often better to say less than more. Your presence is often more valuable than saying many words.**

As a relative of those who have lost a child you may find it difficult to find the right words to say. It is understandable and natural to experience helplessness in the face of the grief and trauma of loved ones. Talk to the parents about your weaknesses. Say that you lack the words. It is better than saying too many words that, despite good intentions, may be misunderstood and even hurtful. Avoid giving advice unless you are asked to do so. Remember that words alone cannot erase the sorrow. Nevertheless, it can reduce the loneliness that often accompany grief when parents feel that you are not afraid to talk to them and are willing to listen to their feelings and emotions.

## Things that can help:

- Try to listen rather than speak.
- Acknowledge your weaknesses.
- If you say something awkwardly or clumsily, apologize to the parents, it helps.
- If the child has been given a name, use his or her name.
- Take care of the parents. Tell them that they are in your thoughts. Do not be afraid of their feelings. Remember that their tears are not because of something you say or do. Tears and feelings are a natural part of grief. Let the parents cry. Let them talk about their baby. Do not be afraid to call the child by its name. Most parents find it comforting that their child has not been forgotten.
- Do not pressure parents who are grieving to go out in public. Show them support and understanding if they do not trust themselves to attend events where there are little children present, e.g. birthdays, baptisms, etc. However, this does not mean that the grieving parents are not happy for you and your children.
- Offer them your assistance with practical things, e.g. help with their older children, house chores, cooking, cleaning, etc. Keep in mind that the parents may refuse any help. Do not take it personally.
- Contact the parents regularly. While they will certainly need time for themselves and each other, it is important to remember that grief can contribute to isolation. Grieving parents often need their loved ones, family and friends. Many people experience loneliness in grief since relatives and friends may keep themselves at a distance because they are unsure of how to behave towards those who grieve.
- Send sympathy cards, flowers and greetings to the grieving parents. Show that they are in your thoughts.
- Try your best to remember important dates. Feel free to ask the parents how and if they would like you to be a part of them.

## Try not to say:

- **"The child is in a better place."** or **"The child was not meant to live."** For parents who want nothing more than their child, words of this kind are seldom comforting. They downplay the parents' grief and can further empathize the loneliness that often accompanies grief after loss.
- **"You can have another child."** It is natural to wish that parents who lose their child will eventually have another child. At the same time, it is important to remember that they are deeply saddened by the loss of their child. Another child does not replace the child who has passed. The words above are seldom relevant. They may have the effect that parents feel that little is done about their grief.
- **"Things will get better over time."** Of course, most people learn to live with their grief over time. At the same time, loss is an experience that will always be a part of the parents' life story.
- **"You are so strong. I could not go through the loss of a child."** Remember that grief and trauma are not choices but experiences that everyone must deal with to the best of their ability.
- **"You have other children."** Certainly, children are the most precious to us. However, other children will not be able to reduce the grief of the child who died. Grief always needs its space and place.
- **"Fortunately, you did not know the child."** or **"Fortunately, your pregnancy did not go on any further."** Remember that every pregnancy has expectations, hopes and dreams. When a child dies, these same expectations are met and parents experience deep sadness. Regardless of the length of pregnancy, loss is often a painful experience.
- **"It was good how early the fetal defect was discovered."** We all want healthy children. When it becomes clear during pregnancy that there is a serious fetal defect that leads parents to face the decision to end their pregnancy, it always causes great sadness. The parents mourn both of these things at the same time: The dream of a healthy child and his or her the well-being.
- **"How is your wife/girlfriend?"** Indeed, it is the mother who goes through pregnancy and childbirth. Remember, though, the partner. They are also mourning.
- **"I know how you feel."** You can try to put yourself in the parents' position and show them empathy, but you rarely know how they feel.

If you want to learn more about grief and reactions to grief or if you are unsure about how best to support the parents in grief, you can get help, guidance or advice from various sources and places, such as the following:

**[www.gme.is](http://www.gme.is)**

**[www.sorgarmidstod.is](http://www.sorgarmidstod.is)**



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