

How to support the childless parent

Many of us attend support group meetings for one reason - a child of ours has died. For some of us, however, the child that died was the only child we had, and though our pain is certainly no worse than those who have surviving children, there are differences. "We" will never hear the word "Mom" or "Dad" again. "We" have no hope of grandchildren. "We" only have ourselves to go on for. During the past seven years there has been many times when I have cringed in meetings as a fellow bereaved parent inadvertently hurt me. How can you as a compassionate friend help?

I have listed some ways to make it easier for a parent, with no surviving child, to be comfortable at support group meetings.

- * When a parent with no surviving children is in your group, please don't bring out the pictures of your grandchildren. Save them for someone who at least has the hope of grandchildren. We do not.
- * Though you may have special problems with your surviving child (children) don't expound on them. We would love to have any problem at all.
- * Please don't say, "I don't know how you bear it." That is equivalent to someone who has not had a child to die saying the same words to you. We "bear it" because we have no choice, just as you do not.
- * Please do not tell us, "But you have your husband/wife." It's just not the same.
- * Please don't say, "You don't have the worry about having another child die." We would love to have that worry.
- * Please do not tell us that entering menopause is nothing to be concerned about. To us, it is the ending of a chance that we will ever have a child to parent again.
- * Please do not bring "surprises" to meetings. Support groups are for adults and while there are occasions when bringing a child is appropriate, please do not do so unannounced. The sight of a child (be it your own, or a grandchild) may bring tears to my eyes. I want to be "safe" just as you do.
- * If you are fortunate enough to have another child. I am happy for you. But please do not tell me the details of your pregnancy. For some of us, that is not an option.
- * Please don't tell us there are lots of children in this world to "parent". This may be true, and while I may do so someday, it must be my choice.

* I understand that grief is not a contest. I know my pain is not worse than yours, but it is different, and there are different bridges to cross. Thank you for being compassionate to all of us.

Vicki

In memory of my son, Sandy