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**GRANDPARENTS ARE OFTEN OVERLOOKED  
WHEN A GRANDCHILD DIES, YET THEY CARRY  
A DOUBLE BURDEN; THE LOSS OF THEIR  
GRANDCHILD AND THE SORROW OF THEIR  
OWN GRIEVING CHILDREN.**



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# **BEREAVEMENT GRANDPARENTS AND GRIEF**

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When a grandchild dies, the anguish of grandparents is doubled. Their grief for a son or daughter suffering this tragic loss only compounds their pain at the loss of a beloved grandchild. Grandparents who outlast a grandchild struggle with a death that seems out of order; they cope with survival guilt, perhaps wondering why they couldn't have died instead. Moreover a grandchild's death chips away at a grandparent's assumed legacy. Most of us hope to make a mark in the world, and the achievements of our children and grandchildren are part of that dream. When one dies prematurely, that loss resonates through the generations.

In many families the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is very important. The death of a grandchild ranks high on the scale of human grief. However it is rarely acknowledged. There are few books or support groups addressing the grief of grandparents, and bereavement counselors who specialize in this kind of grief are rare. Grandparents are often left to cope as best they can.

Some families are fractured by divorce, violence or mere inattention, and grandparents fill the role of the enduring presence. They are the ones who are available and who can be depended upon for affection and support. The deep, nurturing love shared by many children and their grandparents is a bond that is extraordinarily painful when broken by death. It is a grief that may not be as noticed as with the parents, but nonetheless powerful.

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If you are a grandparent who has lost a grandchild, you have every reason to grieve deeply. Life is complex, and many of our fundamental questions have no apparent answer: Why do such bad things happen? What is the meaning of such pain? For now, your task is to mourn the death of this child and to take care of yourself as best as you can. If you want help, look for a book that addresses parental grief and substitute "grandparent" as you read. Perhaps your local funeral chapel, faith community, hospital, library or mental health centre has material on the topic of grief. You may also want to inquire about a support group for grieving grandparents.

### **SUGGESTIONS THAT MAY HELP:**

- Be patient with yourself and don't try to suppress your grief. Stoicism won't work
  - Select the relatives or friends who give you comfort, and tell them how you feel
  - Don't accept a comparison of your grief to that of others; grief is unique to each person
  - Take time off from your grief occasionally. Go visit a friend or take a short vacation at a place that you love
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It is important that you find ways to fill the void in your life. The worlds of literature, music, and art can be sources of great comfort in a time of grief. For example, if you have always wanted to paint, take some classes and dedicate your efforts to the memory of your grandchild. Sign up as a volunteer for a local hospital or food bank. Helping others can strengthen and nurture those who have been injured by this death. By putting your pain to work, the good that comes from it can heal.

When a great loss hits us, we are numbed and life seems meaningless for a while. But with the passage of time, we again begin to see that life is still worth living, not just for others but for ourselves as well. Just as you loved a grandchild, there are others who await your love. You have the right to be a survivor and to make the most of each day.

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