

Dos and Don'ts for bereaved dads

Written by dads for dads

✓ DO

✓ **Do** be willing to accept help from others when you feel weak.

✓ **Do** cry when you need to. Laugh when you can.

✓ **Do** understand that others in your family will express their pain and grief in different ways. This does not mean that they loved your child any more or any less.

✓ **Do** be realistic. Give yourself time and space to grieve, especially if you return to work soon after the funeral.

✓ **Do** talk to your partner about the pressures you face at work, e.g. colleagues not understanding. Let her know that you are hurting deeply but don't always know how to express it.

✓ **Do** allow your partner and other family members space to talk without interruption.

✓ **Do** talk with others about the different ways men and women grieve. Allow others to express their grief and find help in different ways to you.

✓ **Do** realise that feeling angry is a normal response to pain. One way to release anger is to simply do nothing for ten minutes except through vigorous sport or other physical activity, e.g. gardening. Another way is to learn how to simply do nothing for ten minutes, except to sit and be aware of your own breathing.

✗ DON'T

✗ **Don't** take on board society's expectation that you must be the strong one.

✗ **Don't** keep a stiff upper lip.

✗ **Don't** expect to grieve in the same way as others. We're all different and we grieve in different ways.

✗ **Don't** throw yourself into work or projects in an attempt to forget your child's death.

✗ **Don't** expect your sexual relationship with your partner to resume quickly. It might, but recognise that both of you may have different needs and perspectives.

✗ **Don't** shut yourself off from your partner and other close family members.

✗ **Don't** be so preoccupied with supporting your partner and family that you don't grieve for yourself.

✗ **Don't** allow anger and resentment – towards the hospital, doctor, driver, police, God or anyone else – to smoulder inside you. Recognise that you may be feeling angry with yourself because you couldn't protect your family.

✗ **Don't** blame yourself for what you could not change, or for what you might have been able to change. It won't help!

✓ DO

✓ **Do** write your feelings down. Over time, you will be able to see progress as you go through the feelings of anger, resentment, regret and deep sorrow.



✓ **Do** pluck up the courage to speak on the phone to another bereaved dad through *Bereaved Parent Support*



✓ **Do** expect that, over time, as you work through your grief and pain – both on your own and with others – memories of your child will become a source of comfort, joy and strength for the future.



✓ **Do** tell others what you need. Sometimes you may want to be talk and be listened to, at other times you may rather be on your own.



✓ **Do** be aware that when you are in a vulnerable emotional state you are highly susceptible to your weaknesses.



✓ **Do** make sure that you enjoy things (when you are able to) without feeling guilty. For example, allow yourself to enjoy thirty minutes with a TV comedy programme – it does you good!



✓ **Do** be kind to yourself and look after yourself.



✗ DON'T

✗ **Don't** expect your life to ever be the same again. Your child will never be forgotten or replaced, but will always be a special part of your life.



✗ **Don't** be afraid to let people know when they are not being helpful. Be gentle, if you can!



✗ **Don't** be tempted to ignore the danger of alcohol or substance misuse – it can feel like an easy way of numbing the pain.



✗ **Don't** think you will never again enjoy something that you previously did with your child (e.g. going to a football match). It is possible, but it will be different.



✗ **Don't** feel guilty when, some days, you feel OK.

