



You, Me, Us: Supporting Couples After the Death of a Child

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Please note: The information provided on this program is intended for educational purposes only.

If you or a loved one needs professional support, please contact TAPS 24/7 at 800-959-TAPS (8277).



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Introductions

Tamarack Grief Resource Center strengthens and honors individuals, families, and communities throughout their journey with grief.



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A Few Thoughts About Grief...

- Grief is a natural response to loss
- Death ends a life but not a relationship
- There are many ways to grieve
- There are many common challenges and myths that can complicate grief
- Similarly, there are many tips and tools to offer bits of comfort and strength.



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Common Challenges



- Responding very differently to loss
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Difficulty being present for partner and/or surviving kids
- Finding yourselves in very different emotional spaces, or perceived pressure to feel a certain way
- Feeling disconnected, overwhelmed
- Desire to take care of one another and unsure how to do so

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Grief Styles

- Instrumental and Intuitive (Doka & Martin)
- Colors of Grief (Darcie Sims)
- The question:

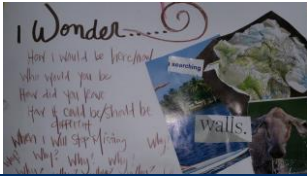


How can we best support ourselves and one another?

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Your Grief, My Grief, and Grief in Relationship

Myths, realities, and tips for "Us"-ness after loss



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Myth 1



Talking about my pain and our loss will upset my partner when they are having a "good" day.



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Myth 1



Myth: Talking about my pain and our loss will upset my partner when they are having a "good" day.

Reality: The couple system often maintains balance by one partner having a "good" day when the other partner is having a "bad" day.



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Tool for Reconnection



- Plan ahead for how you will signal to your partner that you need support.
- Identify what will be helpful from your partner (often different from one another and day to day) and let them know.

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Myth 2



We must participate in and continue family traditions during holidays, birthdays, vacations, etc.

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Myth 2



Myth: We must participate in and continue family traditions during holidays, birthdays, vacations, etc.

Reality: One or both of you may not feel like showing up or planning traditional events.

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Tool for Reconnection



- Discuss what makes sense one event at a time.
 - Do we wish to keep it the same?
 - Don't do it at all?
 - Create a new version?
 - Do something completely different?
- We honor our grief when we take stock and move with flexibility in our decisions.
- Allow yourselves to do things differently.

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Myth 3



When people ask about our loss, we "have" to tell them our story.

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Myth 3



Myth: When people ask about our loss, we "have" to tell them our story.

Reality: Well-meaning family, friends, and acquaintances may ask for a myriad of reasons. You are not obligated to tell your story at any time.

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Tool for Reconnection



- Plan an "elevator speech" response:
I appreciate your asking and that you care about us, but now is not a good time for me to talk about it.

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Myth 4



When a child dies the couple will probably get a divorce.

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Myth 4



Myth: When a child dies the couple will probably get a divorce.
Reality: Marital relationships are often strained by the death of a child and the aftermath. Still, many couples navigate the loss together and maintain "us-ness," leaning on their relationship for support.

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Tools for Reconnection



- Stay checked-in.
- Plan regular times to talk about the day-to-day responsibilities that need attention, maintain flexibility.
- Perhaps most importantly, cut each other some slack.

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Myth 5



If I (or my partner) experience(s) joy, I am (they are) not expressing appropriate love for our child.

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Myth 5



Myth: If I (or my partner) experience(s) joy, I am (they are) not expressing appropriate love for our child.
Reality: We can experience a range of emotions simultaneously. To experience great delight, pride, love, joy, silliness, etc. does not mean we are not also experiencing despair, confusion, longing, etc.

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Tool for Reconnection



- Strive to allow your self and your partner to experience and express different emotions. *If it's not hurting you or someone else, it's probably ok.*

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Partnership

True partnership isn't one with no conflict, ever. It's a container where we bring a genuine desire to help each other feel important and understood. Some of the most beautiful moments occur when we drop our walls. @sheleannaaiyana



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Additional Tools for Reconnection

- Hold and lean on your core message
 - *I love you*
 - *I want to be on your team*
 - *I am on your team*
- Learn strategies for self-soothing and commit to staying calm regardless of partner's emotional space
- Find a small way to express fondness or admiration
- Acknowledge you are both forever changed and commit to create a new normal together



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Feeling Important and Understood

- Self awareness: What makes you feel important? Understood?
- Empathy: What makes your partner feel important? Understood?



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Honor and Remembrance

- Be aware of grieving styles
- Consider different ways of commemorating:
 - Narrative / Sharing
 - Saying name
 - Sharing stories
 - Recalling memories
 - Creative
 - Creating a book, poem, song, dance
 - Constructing a quilt
 - Painting a room a certain color
 - Baking a favorite dish or dessert
 - Active
 - Visiting places of significance
 - Participating in recreation you shared together
 - Symbolic
 - Lighting a candle
 - Burning messages
 - Creating a shrine



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Tools for Supporting Self AND for Supporting the “Us”

- Self-care vs. self-indulgence**
- Examples of individual self-care
 - The practice of self-soothing or self-regulation

- How can you focus on “self-care” for the “us”?**
- Intentionally develop plans to help emotionally and relationally prepare for significant dates and challenges
 - “Couples get stuck when they defend their intentions instead of focusing on how they made their partner feel” (Gotman Institute)
 - Small things often



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BELIEVE IN US

They say—
That we, *will never make it.*
And they are right.
We will never make it *somewhere*
If we stop believing—*in us,*
And believe in what they say.

—Clairel Estevez



Together, we are stronger.





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About the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing®

Launched in March 2018 through an alliance with HFA, the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing® serves as a resource and training center, providing programs for both professionals working in the field of grief and loss and the public.



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Upcoming TAPS Institute Programs

- February 11** **Grief River: A Nature-Inspired Map for Understanding Grief and Loss**
Live Webinar, Noon-1:00 p.m. ET
- **Thom Dennis**, DMin, LCPC, CT, Bereavement Coordinator, Northshore University Health System
- February 18** **Who Am I Now? Life After Caregiving Ends**
Live Webinar, Noon-1:00 p.m. ET
- **William G. Hoy**, DMin, FT, Clinical Professor; University of Baylor
- February 25** **Supporting Bereaved Children with Autism**
Live Webinar, Noon-1:30 p.m. ET
- **Margaret Lynn B. Kobb**, MDiv, Staff Chaplain, Co-Chair Elect, Diversity & Inclusion Core Council, Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania
 - **David Stevenson**, MDiv, CT, Bereavement Counselor, Crossroads Hospice & Palliative Care

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