

PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

By Nadine Boyd

Dear Compassionate Friends:

In previous columns I have written about taking care of yourself physically and emotionally to get through the worst of the grief. This month I want to write about-gasp!-physical intimacy. In all my years with Compassionate Friends I have never seen any columns, or sat through any sharing sessions dealing with this topic, but it can be a real issue with grieving couples. It can make you feel closer emotionally to your partner, or create further feelings of isolation.

So now I will boldly go where....(well, you get the idea).

Perhaps you are in so much pain that being intimate is the last thing you are thinking about. Perhaps you feel guilty that you are feeling "those" thoughts, but just maybe it can be a way of connecting emotionally with your partner. Perhaps you think you should not feel pleasure or joy-that it will diminish your grief.

But-maybe it can bring you both comfort and emotional connection. Maybe it can be a way to reach out to your partner to acknowledge his pain and grief. Men are emotional beings too, but society does not often give them permission to grieve. It's only with the people closest to them they can let their guard down and their emotions show. It is a sign of great trust to allow each other to grieve. Men want their wives to show them that they're appreciated, and they want women to understand how hard they're trying to get things right. Maybe you are both hurting so badly it is difficult to communicate, but intimacy is a way of being close and connected to the one person who loved your child as much as you do. You might not be at the same place in your grief, but it is a way of reaching out to your love, your partner, your best friend, the person who may know you the best. He feels as helpless as you do in trying to comfort you and take care of you and the rest of your family.

I have mentioned the "shoulda, woulda, coulda"s that every grieving parent goes through. We blame ourselves and believe there must have been something we could have done to protect our children-that somehow we could have prevented their deaths. I think men feel even more strongly that they didn't "do their job" to protect their family and keep their child safe. He may even feel that you blame him somehow. It is important not to blame each other. I know both of you are hurt and angry and it is natural to try to blame someone-to lash out in your anger, but sometimes things said in the heat of anger cannot be taken back and cause even more damage to a fragile emotional state.

An article I read once suggested "Focus on making your relationship more loving and connected....but know that sex **does** matter-it's one of the key ways your guy expresses his love and feels close to you, so be sure to keep it a priority."

I remember how shocked I was when a friend who had worked with my husband came with her husband to visit us shortly after Aaron died and she very bluntly advised me to remember to be intimate with my husband-that he needed me to be there in that way for him. I had just met her and was pretty surprised that she would say that, but their marriage had survived a very trying time when their little son was diagnosed with cancer, and she had "walked that walk". I am happy to say their son survived, but it was a very emotionally devastating time for their whole family with numerous trips to Denver and an uncertain prognosis. They had other small children to take care of, and usually one parent went with the sick child and one parent stayed behind to care for the other children and keep the household running. She, too, shared that men express their feelings of love and emotional connection for their partners through physical intimacy, and it is important for your relationship to know that it matters.

Remember-you are not alone in this pain. Your partner is suffering as much as you are. He loves and misses his child too. Who better to share the tears and the laughter and the memories with? Together you created and nurtured and loved this child-together you grieve and miss and honor this child. Take care of each other. Comfort each other. Love each other. Heal each other with touch and caring.

In friendship,

Nadine

