

PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

By Nadine Boyd

Dear Compassionate Friends:

Those of us who have been on this path to healing from grief for a while have unfortunately heard some very hurtful comments from well-meaning people who just didn't know better. I have compiled a list of:

Things Not to Say to a Grieving Parent

1. **"It was God's will-you shouldn't question it".** Yes, yes, I can and do.
2. **"He's in a better place".** I know that's true, but he was taken from our arms far before we were ready to let him go back to God.
3. **"You can always have another child."** Maybe I can, but I cannot replace this precious child. He is not a goldfish.
4. **"You're so brave! I just couldn't go on if anything happened to my child!"** What are you saying? You love your child more than I love mine because I am doing the best I can to function without him?
5. **"At least you have your other children."** Yes, I do and I am profoundly grateful and blessed to have them, but we all miss and grieve for the one who isn't here.
6. **"You shouldn't feel that way."** I can feel however I wish. There are no good or bad feelings-you feel how you feel. It's how you react to those feelings that define "good" or "bad".
7. **"At least he isn't suffering anymore."** No, he isn't but WE are. No matter how grim the diagnosis, we held out hope for a miracle. We would have done anything in our power to make him well. It makes me feel selfish and angry we didn't get our miracle.
8. **"I know how you feel."** No, you don't. Even if you have lost your child in the exact same circumstances you don't know how I feel. You don't know what our relationship was like, how I blame myself for not being a good parent or what emotion I'm feeling right then: anger, denial or depression.
9. **Don't avoid or change the subject that my child died.** Don't be afraid you will make me cry. I cry all the time and it makes it worse when no one will say his name. A hug and saying "I'm so sorry" acknowledges my pain and your helplessness to make me feel better. Even better-ask me to tell you about my child and then REALLY listen. Tell me a story or what you loved about my child. I may cry, but I love to hear those stories.
10. **Don't expect me to be back to "normal" soon.** Grief is a very long journey, especially because when my child died I lost all the FUTURE memories too with that child. I have a "different" normal now, and will never be the same person I was before.

One of the most hurtful and damaging comments that was said when our child died was "it's been two weeks now. You need to get on with your life." Don't tell us how or how long to grieve. It is as individual as the person going through it. Ask how you can help. Acknowledge dates of my child's birthday and anniversary of his death. A card that simply says you are thinking of us means a lot. Acknowledge that holidays are going to be different now. Don't judge me because I still go to the cemetery to visit his grave several times a week, have his pictures up next to my other children's pictures, make a birthday cake for his birthday, hang my child's Christmas stocking and put his precious homemade ornaments on the Christmas tree. It comforts me to see his sweet face, and remember how proud he was making his ornaments.

Grieving families are in the strange position of educating the very people who are trying to comfort us. Try to remember we once were very likely in the same position: loving, caring, wanting to help, but having no idea how or what to say and being afraid of saying the wrong thing. They mean well.

I wish you comfort and healing on your journey to healing, and the patience to comfort the comforters.

Happy birthday, Aaron! We love you and miss you always!

In friendship,

Nadine

