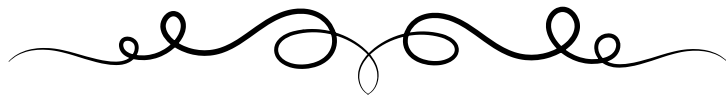


Child Loss and Bereavement Services

Mitchell



"I remember years ago, before I had my children, my friend and I were visiting with a woman who had lost both her son and her husband. My friend asked her which one was more

difficult for her and she quickly responded, "Oh by far my son! For you see, I carried him under my heart."

I didn't think much of this until I experienced the loss of my son, Mitchell and then I understood what she felt. Mitchell was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia at the age of 8. He courageously battled for 2 years and one month, but in the end the horrible disease won.

In a blink of an eye our lives changed forever, our dinner table of 4 became 3, I no longer put 2 children to bed at night, our house was quiet, our dreams for our son were diminished and we were broken. Research states that losing a child is the greatest of losses. There are no words to describe it nor are there words to heal it.

We had a beautiful community that surrounded us with love and support and for that I am grateful, but even my own mother or my best of friends could not understand my heart ache. I stood frozen in time as I watched my son's friends grow up, graduate from High School and head to college. It has been almost 12 years since Mitchell passed away, it has been a long and painful journey. The pain and grief have not gone away, the Mitchell size hole in my heart remains, but with time, with God's help and with the support of other mothers who have experienced the same heart ache, I am

able to carry my pain and grief differently. God has allowed my joy to return and I want to be able to share this with other mothers who walk this path.

Tracy Whitaker, Mitchell's mom

OFN Oncology/Bereavement Coordinator



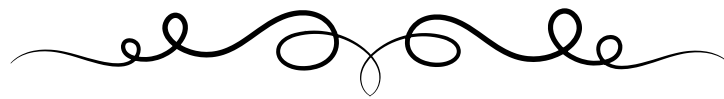
"Losing a child to death is not the order of life, your child is supposed to bury you...not the other way around. The loss of a child is not a "well-known experience" and therefore navigating through this journey is not like other areas of loss and or grief. I hope the words on these pages bring you comfort as you read through it knowing that you are not alone in this."

Loss of Child

Many grief books will say that normal stages of grief include Shock and Denial, Anger and/or Guilt, Intense Grief or Suffering, Depression, Acceptance, and Hope. Some regret to inform you that these stages may or may not come in this exact order. Depending on your personality, religious beliefs, and overall understanding of your loss, you may experience all, some, or none of these feelings. The basic stages of grief have been known to come and go like waves in the ocean. You will experience a wide variety of emotions after your loss, some of which may be frightening, but this is natural. Here are some things experienced by other parents that you may relate to:

- Crying all the time & unexpectedly.
- Extreme physical exhaustion, or a manic energy.
- Difficulty sleeping or wanting to sleep all the time.
- Denial of the loss.
- Unable to concentrate, forgetting things or misplacing items.
- Anxiety, feeling overprotective toward surviving family members.
- The feeling of wanting to die/be with your loved one.
- Anger towards yourself when you smile, laugh, or feel happy.
- Physical pain, such as being unable to catch your breath, tightness in your chest/throat (see a doctor if you are concerned).
- Difficulty with everyday tasks that remind you of your child.

- Losing old friends



Notes From Bereaved Mothers

Charlie _____ **Jordan, Charlie's Mom**

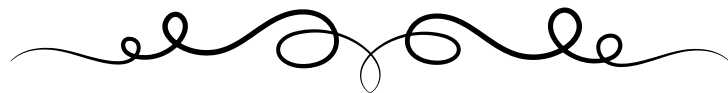
"As I was shopping today, I turned the corner and my breath was taken away. I gasped for air. There it was...a red and black plaid jacket...it screamed for my attention. That jacket was grief tapping me on the shoulder, reminding me of a time where our lives were normal, a time where Charlie wasn't sick, and a time I painfully ache for. Although grief affects me daily, today was different; my grief demanded to be felt right there in Hobby Lobby. Grief is not a sign of weakness or a lack of faith...grief is the price of love. It's all the love I want to give, but I cannot. All that unspent

love gathers up in the corner of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in that hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go."



Josh _____ Amy, Josh's Mom

"I think the hardest part is knowing I will not see him again this side of Heaven. I miss him terribly. I find myself driving while I am alone in my car, telling myself that he is gone. I knew I couldn't walk by his room every day and see it empty. His brother wanted to move into his room, so we repainted and wallpapered a wall. It is nice knowing that there is still "life" in a room. Meeting with a friend who has the same lived experience is very helpful."



Key Points for Bereaved Mothers

THE SHOCK OF THE LOSS LASTS LONGER THAN YOU THINK. PERMIT YOURSELF TO GRIEVE. TELL PEOPLE WHAT YOU NEED. YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO THROUGH THEIR BELONGINGS OR GET RID OF ANYTHING." - HOLLY,

KEATON'S MOM



- Give yourself the time and outlets you need to express your grief, especially since your sorrow may be more prolonged and intense than your partner's.
- Concentrate on your areas of competence as you continue to grieve, allowing the feelings of loss rather than the inadequacy to come forward.
- Say your child's name and talk about them often. Make good self-care a priority. Make sure to eat well-balanced meals, rest when you can, and take a walk around the block to breathe in fresh air.
- You can take better care of your loved ones if you take better care of yourself. Remember that expressing your grief is an important part of coming to terms with your loss.
- Make the effort to meet other moms and families who have suffered a loss. You may find that you relate better to a mother whose loss was similar to yours, or near yours, or even long ago.

Key Points for Bereaved Fathers

"SOME THINGS THAT WERE MOST HELPFUL TO ME WERE STARTING A FOUNDATION TO HONOR HIS LEGACY, BY HELPING OTHERS, AND MAKING SURE HIS STORY AND HOPE ARE EFFECTIVELY ARTICULATED TO

THOUSANDS OF OTHERS. ALSO, GETTING A TATTOO, REMAINING CLOSE TO HIS FRIENDS, AND PLACING A PREMIUM ON RELATIONSHIPS AND MEMORIES." - JOHN, MITCH'S DAD

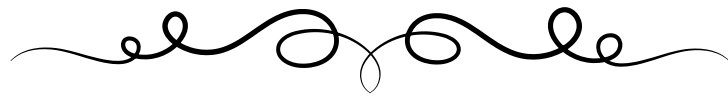


" Our child dies a second time when no one speaks their name."

Mitch Carmody-author and bereaved father.

- You will grieve in your own way. There is no how-to guide for how you should grieve.
- Your grief process will be influenced by who you are, how you were raised, and your life experiences.
- Working side by side may be an easier way to process grief than communicating face to face. You may prefer to do your healing on your own and through your own inner strength.
- You may prefer to take on the role of caretaker of those around you to help you process your own grief. It takes courage to experience and express grief.
- You may not want to talk about it as often as those around you. You may use action instead of talking to work out your feelings.

- Grief is a process that will make you stronger. All people have a combination of both 'masculine' and 'feminine' characteristics that will influence their style of mourning.



The Mourner's Bill of Rights

by Alan Wolfelt, PH.D.

"You are the one who is grieving, and as such, have certain 'rights' no one should try and take away from you. The following list is intended both to empower you to heal and to decide how others can and cannot help."

You have the right to express your own unique grief.

No one else will grieve in the exact same way you do. When you turn to others for help, don't allow them to tell you what you should or should not be feeling.

You have the right to talk about your grief.

Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk as much as you want, as often as you want, about your grief. If at times you do not feel like talking, you have the right to be silent.

You have the right to feel a multitude of emotions.

Confusion, disorientation, fear, guilt, and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel on your grief journey. Others might tell you that feeling angry is wrong. Find listeners who will accept your feelings-without conditions.

You have the right to be tolerant of your physical/emotional conditions.

Your feelings of loss and sadness might leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into things you are not ready to do.

You have the right to experience "grief bursts".

Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but is normal and natural. Find someone who understands and will let you talk it out.

You have the right to make use of ritual.

The funeral ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with support of caring people. More importantly, the funeral is a way for you to mourn. If others tell you the funeral and other rituals such as these are silly or unnecessary, don't listen.

You have the right to embrace your spirituality.

If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you feel angry at God, find someone to talk to who won't be critical of your feelings of hurt and abandonment.

You have the right to search for meaning.

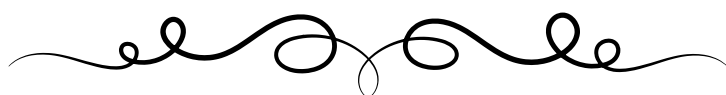
You may find yourself asking, "Why did he or she die? Why this way? Why now?" Some of your questions may have answers, but some may not. And watch out for the clichéd responses some people may give you. Comments like "It was God's will" or "Think of what you have to be thankful for" are not helpful, and you do not have to accept them.

You have the right to treasure your memories.

Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. You will always remember. Instead of ignoring memories, find someone with whom you can share them.

You have the right to move toward your grief and heal.

Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly. Remember, grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor anyone else around you should forget that the death of someone you loved changes your life forever.



What I love about Oklahoma Family Network

A Place of Healing and Hope

Just a few short years ago, I didn't know how to get to Children's Hospital from our house without using Google maps, I had never

heard the word Medulloblastoma, and I wasn't a cancer mom. A lot can change in the blink of an eye.

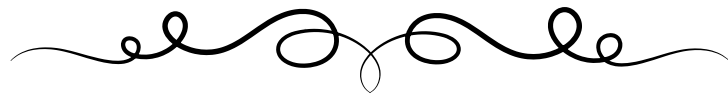
December 12, 2015, is a date that changed my world forever. I learned that our precious two year old son, Stan, was diagnosed with a brain tumor, and that it was cancerous three days later. The early days of living on the oncology floor are scary, blurry, and cold, not just physically. I learned so many medical terms, met amazing doctors and nurses, and was introduced to several organizations, local and national, that wanted to help our son, and our family.

Oklahoma Family Network was with us from the beginning....I met wonderful and caring women/moms from OFN, all who had been in my position, or one similar, at one time or another during their child's life, and I was not alone. Throughout Stan's diagnosis, I knew I could reach out to any of the OFN staff and they could help me in any situation or answer any question I might have.

OFN was amazing! After Stan's treatment, and sadly, his passing, OFN has continued to be a part of my life. These women, who are now my friends, have an organization that can help in any challenge your family might have happen to them, just like mine did.

-Lindsey Evans, Stan's Mom





**“When life sends you down the
road less traveled, take a friend
or BE ONE.”**



**Many parents say what helped them the most was talking
to another parent.**

Oklahoma Family Network provides "Supporting Parents" who help by sharing their experiences, knowledge, and hope with other parents who have a child with a chronic health condition, disability, or behavioral health concern.

"Supporting Parents" also provide connections with other parents who have lost a child or currently have a child in hospice care.

If you are interested in visiting with a "Supporting Parent" or becoming one,
contact:

www.oklahomafamilynetwork.org **405-271-5072 or 877-871-5072**

