**When Your Child Dies**

*by John Kennedy Saynor*

In her book, How to Survive the Loss of a Child, Catherine Sanders begins with these words: “The death of a child is an impossible grief.” Why is the death of a child an impossible grief?

First, very few parents expect to outlive their children. Parents have dreams and hopes for their children and the children are supposed to live to fulfill their parents’ dreams.

Secondly, parents often live through their children. Children are able to do things their parents couldn’t. Children keep the spirit of adventure alive in their parents.

Thirdly, most parents find very little, if any support after a child dies. Why? Quite simply, most people don’t know what to say. If they say anything, it often isn’t helpful. Many friends find it too difficult a situation to deal with.

Finally, probably more than any other loss, the death of a child brings unbelievable strain on the parents’ relationship. Couples do well to seek professional counselling.

**“How will I get through this?”**

1. **Keep the lines of communication open.** The death of a child often causes family communication to break down. So it is important to keep talking!
2. **Express your feelings.** Anger, remorse, fear, loneliness, sadness, depression, are often experienced by those whose child has died. It is important to express your feelings.
3. **Recognize you now have limitations** in your role as a spouse or parent. Your own pain will be so intense at times that you will feel you have nothing to give the rest of the family.
4. **Take care of yourself physically.** Proper food, rest, and exercise are important so you can maintain the energy you need to cope.
5. **Seek spiritual support.** Your faith or spirituality, may grow or diminish during this time. Listen to the words and music of your spirituality. Let them comfort you.
6. **Expect special days to be difficult**. My experience has been that the anticipation of a special day is worse than the day itself. Plan ahead so you are in control of it – not the day in control of you.
7. **Hold on to your hope!** Open yourself to others who share a similar loss. You will find meaning and joy in life again as long as you don’t lose hope.
8. **Recognize when you begin to heal.** It takes time! Eventually days will pass and you will think, “I’ve had a good day. I can’t let this happen!” Not at all! You are beginning to heal. Let the healing begin!