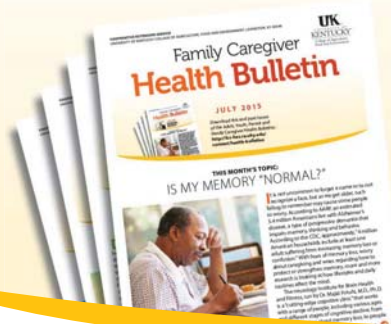


# Family Caregiver Health Bulletin



**FEBRUARY 2016**

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Effingham, KS 66023  
913-833-5450  
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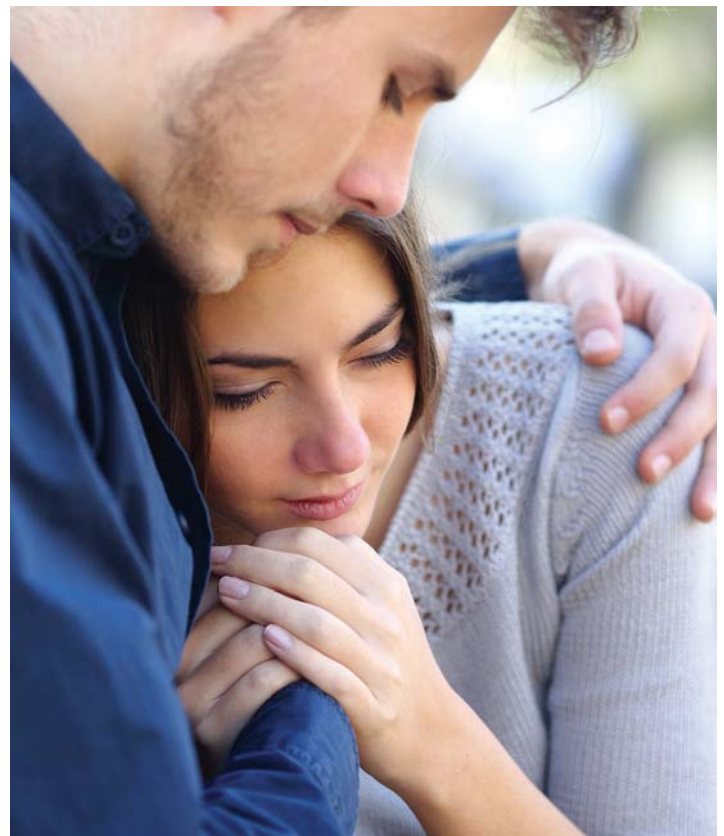
## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

# SURVIVING AFTER THE DEATH OF A CHILD

**T**he death of a child is the most devastating type of loss any parent may experience. In addition to the painful, difficult and dark grief and overwhelming sadness, you feel as if you have lost a part of yourself and it can be overwhelming to anticipate a future that will now be different. Perhaps comfort can be found in knowing that you are not the only parent who has lost a child and that with time, while you will never forget, you will find ways to move forward and live.

According to the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, more than 57,000 children die every year in the United States. They die as a result of stillbirths and miscarriages, shaken baby syndrome, SIDS, illness, accidents, natural disasters and violence. Missing and abducted children also cause unbearable grief, as the unknown results in confusion, anxiety and fear.

Questioning whether life will hold meaning, wondering if you can survive the pain or feeling as



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## *It can be helpful to put into words what you are thinking and feeling.*

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if there is a hole in your heart in addition to guilt, self-blame, anger, confusion, sorrow and depression are common feelings and emotions for parents who have lost a child. So too is having trouble laughing or smiling again or going to the grocery store and seeing your child's favorite foods. You might feel heaviness in your chest or as if you cannot function well enough to work or get through daily activities. You might feel frustrated with family and friends who "don't get it" or think that you should get "over this" or "move on." This intense grieving is natural and normal and while it may be hard to believe, it is important to know that you will not always feel this all-consuming sadness and despair. While you cannot ignore your grief, there are some things you can do to change the intensity of feelings as you work through your loss.

*Remember that grief is a journey and that with time, your overwhelming sadness will soften and you will be able to shift your focus from your child's death toward your child's life.*

- **Keep up your family routines.** Routines help provide stability and structure in a world that has become confusing.
- **Talk about your child,** including your experience with his or her death, if you are able.
- **Write.** It can be helpful to put into words what you are thinking and feeling.
- **Communicate and share with surviving children.** Surviving children sometimes become "forgotten mourners" due to the attention placed on parents and the child who died. Communicate, be open and help siblings understand that this loss is a shared experience
- **Honor your child.** Keep your child alive in your heart by celebrating birthdays, planting a tree on a significant anniversary or starting a



memorial or foundation of some kind.

- **Attend a support group.** Talking and being with others who share similar experiences can be helpful because they "get it."

Grieving parents wonder if life can ever be good again. It can. But you have to remember that grief is a journey and that with time, your overwhelming sadness will soften and you will be able to shift your focus from your child's death toward your child's life. This does not mean that you ever forget or stop loving your child. But it does mean that you, as many others have who have come before you, can create a different future and survive.

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Family Caregiver  
**Health Bulletin**

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