

A MAN'S GRIEF

SIDS and Kids SA Forum for Fathers
16 February 2011

The forum was conducted in a confidential discussion format that had participants concluding "It's a relief to know that I'm not alone" (in the way I think and feel and do), "Even though we are different, we have shared much of the same experience".

Consistently the comment of fathers, like mothers, were ;

- WHY did this event happen?
- Will we ever be able to have another child?
- Can our relationship survive this?
- Have I done something wrong and this is some form of punishment?

There has been the experience of losing "friends" that couldn't understand or provide support in grief, the sense of change in their relationship (that neither were the same person as they used to be), a sense of loss of motivation and purpose in life accompanied by depression. On a more positive note there was a gratitude and appreciation of the next conception, a shift in awareness that perhaps there were other men that could be helped and a realisation that "I don't sweat the small things anymore".

Men find that they need a retreat, solitude in terms of time and space to contemplate is part of the male grieving process. Counselling was also a positive experience not so much in a group or couple, but individual.

There was varying responses to the way communication was handled – from being proactive and protective of their partners to letting comments pass over and not respond. Particularly when ill informed comments were made based on the assumption that if you had returned to work then you were O.K. There was a consensus that men needed at least 6 weeks after a stillbirth or sudden death before they returned to work and then to build that up over a couple of weeks.

Generally it was hard to communicate grief to others, especially if they hadn't been through it themselves.

The general message was "get counselling", "give the grieving father the message of time – time to heal and regain hope" and "not to feel guilty about getting some personal time to grieve."

Interestingly many relationships struggle at this time when both the mother and father are simultaneously grieving. Fathers felt that they tended to shelve their grief in order to support their partner physically, emotionally and intellectually. Isolation, depression were huge factors, communication breakdown, lack of interest in decisions, emotional instability were part of daily existence. Fathers talked about how difficult it was for them to go to the shops and see other young parents with children, exactly like mothers, but they felt the responsibility of getting the job done as their priority for the family.

Many of the things that couples “used to do” had been overlooked or forgotten, the things that brought them together and contributed toward their mutual happiness. i.e. making arrangements to go out once a fortnight or a month, sitting down for an hour a week (without interruption) and ‘really’ talking/listening about things that are important, making personal/couple and family time within each week. One thing that has been found to work is negotiating a 20 minute “buffer” after leaving work and arriving home. Take this time to de-stress from the day on the understanding that any problems or discussions can be tackled with a fresh perspective. Then, take at least 10 minutes each just to debrief your day.

Sids & Kids SA will continue to offer the men’s forum on a quarterly basis with details published in our Newsletter together with email and post advice to registered fathers/grandfathers.

Peter Papps
(08) 83690155
e: peterpapps@sidsandkids.org