

Loving Well in the Face of Loss: Preparing Foster Families for When a Child Leaves

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Travis Jones, LPC

Development Director • Covenant Kids, Inc.

817.516.9100 • tjones@covenantkids.org

www.covenantkids.org

Although our stories and journeys differ from family to family, the desire to love and cherish our children grows in all of our hearts from a very young age.

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We begin loving our children even before we know them; even before we know how or when they will join our family. We love our children unconditionally, we have dreams and hopes for them, and we love the future that they represent.

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- What is Grief?
 - Grief is a natural response to any loss.
 - The grief process, on average, usually takes about 2 years.
 - Five common stages of grief are: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance
 - Another model calls the stages: Shock, Reality, Reaction and Recovery
 - It is important to recognize that we all grieve in different ways. Even though most people move through all of the common stages of grief, it can often look very different.

- Why Grieve?

- Life won't just go on – even if Denial feels good

- Going on a bear hunt...

- Can't go over it

- Can't go under it

- Can't go around it

- Got to go through it**

- John 16:33 (NIV)

- “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

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- Preparing for Grief
 - Why prepare for Grief?

- We are not in control!
- James 4:13-15 (The Message)

And now I have a word for you who brashly announce, "Today—at the latest, tomorrow—we're off to such and such a city for the year. We're going to start a business and make a lot of money." You don't know the first thing about tomorrow. You're nothing but a wisp of fog, catching a brief bit of sun before disappearing. Instead, make it a habit to say, "If the Master wills it and we're still alive, we'll do this or that."

- Choosing reality is healthy

- Preparing for Grief
 - How do you prepare for Grief?
 - Faith and Facts
 - Transforming how you think
 - Choosing the words you speak
 - Sharing openly with those who are close to you
 - Taking action

- “Getting Back in the Saddle”

- Living after loss requires establishing, and accepting, life in a “new normal.”
- Making ourselves vulnerable and placing ourselves in circumstances to encounter our loss, again, can be frightening, gripping, paralyzing, unsettling.

- Things you can do for others
 - Pray
 - Say something
 - The worst thing to say is nothing!
 - It's okay to tell your grieving friend/relative that you don't know what to say.
 - Avoid clichés, even Christian clichés
 - Share your condolences, thoughts, feelings, and encouragement
 - Send Cards, Letters, and Emails
 - Call or visit
 - Send Flowers
 - Don't stop! It's such a blessing to know that someone still cares 3, 6, and 9 months later.

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- Things you can do for others
 - Don't forget your grieving loved one on birthdays, anniversaries, or special holidays
 - Use the child's name
 - Serve your grieving loved one
 - Bring food
 - Help out with household tasks
 - Offer to babysit to offer alone time
 - Serve through acts of kindness
 - Share inspiring and encouraging music
 - Add your grieving friends to a prayer list

- Things you can do for others
 - Talk about the child and Ask questions about the child
 - Share your feelings, be open and vulnerable
 - Give a gift of remembrance
 - Jewelry
 - Figurines
 - Pictures
 - Make a donation
 - To a charity of choice
 - Purchase Gideon Bibles in memory of the child
 - Purchase books for a church, school, or community library in memory of the child

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- Things you can do for yourself

- Journal
- Write a letter
 - To your lost child
 - To their future
 - To their birth family or adoptive family
- Connect with others who have shared a similar experience
- Read about grief and loss—there are many great books that will educate and encourage.
- Participate in Support Groups
- Participate in remembrance events
- Create a special ritual to remember your child
- Talk with others—don't hold in your thoughts and feelings

- Things you can do for yourself
 - Share what you feel and need with your friends and family
 - Plant a tree or do something lasting to remember your child
 - List your blessings or the ways that others have cared for you
 - Meditate on the things that you can be grateful for and the ways that God has provided for you and your family
 - Display items of memory and meaning
 - Process your thoughts and feelings with a counselor
 - Call your child by name
 - Exercise
 - Take care of yourself
 - It's okay to have fun, to live and to enjoy life.

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- Who have you lost?
 - What helped you?
 - What didn't help?
 - What would have helped more?
 - How is your grief different from that of your spouse or close friends/family?
- Who might you lose?
 - How can you prepare for loss?
 - What do you think would help you prepare?
 - What can you do, now, to prepare for your loss?
- What have your children lost?
 - How does your child grieve?
 - What helps them?
 - What might help them to grieve even more productively?

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- Grief is a process; an experience. Learning more about grief, talking about it, or just reflecting, is helpful, but it can't take place of allowing yourself to really feel the things that you feel and to truly live out and live through your grief. Healing takes place on an experiential level.

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- 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NIV)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.