

## WHEN YOU WISH UPON A STAR

Every time I am in a group of bereaved parents, I hear people say things like, "I wish my child hadn't died" or "I wish I had him back." Those wishes, unfortunately, can never come true. Another wish I hear is "I wish my friends (or church, or neighbors, or relatives) understood what I am going through and were more supportive." This is a wish that has some possibility of coming true if we are able to be honest and assertive with the people around us. What do we wish others understood about the loss of our child? Here is a partial list of such wishes.

1. I wish you would not be afraid to speak my child's name. My child lived and was important and I need to hear his name.
2. If I cry or get emotional if we talk about my child, I wish you knew that it isn't because you have hurt me; the fact that my child died has caused my tears. You have allowed me to cry and thank you. Crying and emotional outbursts are healing.
3. I wish you wouldn't "kill" my child again by removing from your home his pictures, artwork, or other remembrances.
4. I will have emotional highs and lows, ups and downs. I wish you wouldn't think that if I have a good day my grief is all over, or that if I have a bad day I need psychiatric counseling.
5. I wish you knew that the death of a child is different from other losses and must be viewed separately. It is the ultimate tragedy and I wish you wouldn't compare it to your loss of a parent, a spouse, or a pet.
6. Being a bereaved parent is not contagious, so I wish you wouldn't shy away from me.
7. I wish you knew all of the "crazy" grief reactions that I am having are in fact very normal. Depression, anger, frustration, hopelessness, and the questioning of values and beliefs are to be expected following the death of a child.
8. I wish you wouldn't expect my grief to be over in six months. The first few years are going to be exceedingly traumatic for us. As with alcoholics, I will never be "cured" or a "former bereaved parent", but will forevermore be a "recovering bereaved parent".
9. I wish you understood the physical reactions to grief. I may gain weight or lose weight, sleep all the time or not at all, develop a host of

illnesses and be accident-prone, all of which may be related to my grief.

10. Our child's birthday, the anniversary of his death, and holidays are a terrible times for us. I wish you would tell us that you are thinking about our child on these days, and if we get quiet and withdrawn, just know that we are thinking about our child and don't try to coerce us into being cheerful.

11. It is normal and good that most of us re-examine our faith, values, and beliefs after losing a child. We will question things we have been taught all our lives and hopefully come to some new understanding with our God. I wish you would let me tangle with my religion without making me feel guilty.

12. I wish you wouldn't offer me drinks or drugs. These are just temporary crutches, and the only way I can get through this grief is to experience it. I have to hurt before I can heal.

13. I wish you understood that grief changes people. I am not the same person I was before my child died and I never will be that person again. If you keep waiting for me to "get back to my old self", you will stay frustrated. I am a new creature with new thoughts, dreams, aspirations, values and beliefs. Please try to get to know the new me -- maybe you'll still like me.

Instead of sitting around and waiting for our wishes to come true, we have an obligation to teach people some of the things we have learned about our grief. We can teach these lessons with great kindness, believing that people have good intentions and want to do what is right, but just don't know what to do with us, or we can sit and wait. I believe our children would want us to help the world understand.

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