



# The Compassionate Friends

Offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents

## FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WHO HAVE DROWNED

There is very little experience which can prepare you for the range of responses you may feel after the devastating loss of a loved one by drowning. Therefore you may worry about your reactions or question your sanity. Family members and friends probably will not understand your grief or know how to support you as they do not realize that your responses are normal.

Members of the family may feel a need to visit the scene of the drowning. Your mind may replay the drowning again and again, trying to work out how it happened, speak to people who were present during or after the drowning accident, i.e. paramedics, neighbours, helpers or other family members. This piecing together of the exact course of events sometimes aids in closure of the loss.

Whatever different feelings you may be experience – disbelief, anger, despair, helplessness, great anguish, pining, longing – are normal and will come and go. There may be days when you simply feel numb.

### ANGER

Angry with God – why your child? Angry with your child for leaving you and causing so much pain? Anger is an emotion which is almost always felt by parents/siblings, so be realistic.

### GUILT/SELF BLAME

Drowning is often associated with enormous feelings of guilt. Try to weigh up how realistic you are being if you are experiencing a sense of guilt or self-accusation. Be careful not to load yourself unrealistically with the responsibility for your child/sibling's death. Your pain is enough to deal with without adding to it.

### DEPRESSION

Listlessness, inability to concentrate and the feeling that you have nothing to live for may be a part of bereavement. Moderate physical activity can be a means of combating depression. Allow family and friends to take care of you. You don't have to be strong. Maintain contact with persons you value.

There may be physical responses to the shock – sleeplessness, nausea, palpitations, headaches, extreme exhaustion. It is a time to take as much care physically as possible. Small nourishing meals, some exercise and rest are beneficial. Excessive reliance on alcohol or drugs should be avoided.

There will be an inquest and you are entitled to attend this. If you are not informed when this will take place, you should make contact with the relevant police station.

It can take months or even years for the inquest to take place. Copies of proceedings/post mortem results can be obtained if desired.

## **COPING CONSTRUCTIVELY**

It is possible to work through your grief. You are changed by the experience but the ability to heal is never lost. Your wounds will become scars which you will always bear but they are bearable. It will help you to cope if you accept that you will come through this nightmare and can make the choice to find life meaningful again. Deal with each day, step by step, and do not look too far ahead.

As a family, talk about the death to each other, talk about your loss and your pain. Talk about the good times you remember as well as the not so good. All family members will be grieving in their own manner. Try to understand this. It is better to express feelings rather than to internalize them. Crying is healthy and therapeutic.

Give yourself time – time – and more time. It takes months, even years, to open your heart and mind to healing. Choose to survive and you will heal.

It may be helpful to write out your feelings or write a letter to your dead child, expressing all the things you were not able to say before the death. For many, it is a good way to say goodbye.

Let friends help. When they ask what they can do to help, don't be afraid to tell them of your needs and what will help you. It will also help them.

***This brochure was sponsored by Engen***

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TRAGEDY