

## **FATHERS THE HIDDEN GRIEVER**

Fathers are often referred to as the hidden grievers. When a child dies, thoughts generally go to the mothers—the agony they most certainly are suffering, their loneliness, emptiness, now that someone who was once a part of them is gone. Women tend to grieve outwardly, talking to their friends, crying, seeking out supportive groups and friends to be with and with whom to share their burden of sorrow.

Men, on the other hand, have a much more inward grieving style. Men are usually more factual than emotional. They accept more readily that nothing they say or do will reverse the situation; their child is irrecoverably gone from this earth. They may weep at times, but that is not their primary mode of mourning. A man may throw himself into his job with fervor, perhaps to help alleviate the feeling that as the “family protector,” he has failed to keep each member safe. He may begin or continue a project, or start a new activity, in memory of his loved one, to whom he dedicates his efforts.

Men are more concrete in their thinking, but that does not mean they grieve less. What it often does mean is that they get less emotional support; people see them return to work, keep busy at home, and assume “they’re over it.” Little do others realize that men agonize through their grief and mourning fully as much as women, and appreciate just as much the caring word, the hug, a recalled memory, a shared moment of silence.

Perhaps the best gift you could ever give a grieving father is the recognition of his loss, and affirming him as a father in mourning. A book especially for men in grief; a card recognizing that he is missing one of those who made him a father, yet he is still a father; a gift in memory of his child; or simply a hug, an arm around the shoulder, or a compassionate word will assure him that although he does not grieve outwardly much, those who truly care about him have not forgotten.