

"Why I hate July..."

By: Tracy Epperson



To whom it may concern:

I have lost my child. I'm sure you are aware of this unpleasant fact, but it has come to my attention that you may not know how to respond to it. Therefore, I, and my brothers and sisters in this horrific journey called bereavement, have put together a few facts to help you help us. We are no longer the person we were when our child was alive, and it may be that some of our new (and often odd) behavior has you puzzled. We are just as bewildered as you, and in fact, there have been many times that we feared we were going insane, having hormonal fluctuations, or experiencing an early (or late) midlife crisis. But in sharing our frustrations with each other, we have come up with a list of very common behaviors that may seem abnormal to you. At one time they would have been abnormal for us as well, but since our loss we have come to learn that we must accept a new normal, and therefore we ask you — those of you who care about and love us — to accept our new normal as well. Here are some of the characteristics you will find prevalent in a parent who has lost a child.

We become overwhelmed easier, minor irritants and setbacks can cause us great angst and discomfort, so that we tend to have what I like to call "episodes", but many people might term them "freak outs". You must understand that every ounce of our energy, intellect and emotion is now, and always will be, focusing on functioning despite the overwhelming pain that is always threatening to overtake us. It leaves very little energy to deal with anything else, so that even "small things" are just too much for us.

Along the same line, stress that we used to deal with and perhaps even thrive under, can now become unbearable — even minor stress may cause emotional distress and/or physical symptoms. Remember, we are daily under the enormous stress of dealing with our tragedy — other stressors added to that may be the proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back.

It is now hard for us to maintain focus for any length of time, making any sort of multitasking difficult, if not impossible. Our symptoms are very similar to Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) — it takes a huge effort on our part to focus on any one thing, if you add any more, we can quickly become confused, distracted, and overwhelmed.

We are plagued with forgetfulness, disorganization and general "loopiness". Even though we may have at one time been the epitome of clear thinking and organization, we now struggle not only with where we laid our car keys, but forgetting simple tasks like paying bills, remembering names and dates, and even how to spell simple words. We all have stories of embarrassing examples: trying to call another person, yet repeatedly dialing our own number, forgetting how to operate the headlights in a car we've owned for years, and on and on. It is sometimes not a constant problem, we may have moments of lucidity, but it is a problem. Please don't belittle or chastise us for it, we are more frustrated than you at the loss of our clear and coherent thought process as well as our memory retention ability.

We often feel the need to stay busy at all times — boredom can be the enemy. Sitting idly often leads to thinking about things we'd rather not face — remembering the accident, wondering what our child would be doing now, etc.

Happy events aren't always happy for us. I may be thrilled for you that you are expecting a child, getting married, or graduating high school, but at the same time I am devastated that my child will never do those things, or that he/she won't be around to witness your happy time too.



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Also, other things that may seem trivial to you can greatly affect us — it may be an emotional struggle for us to merely see a child playing basketball (or any sport our child was involved with) or go to certain place we used to visit with them.

Things such as photographs and mementos take on a new meaning for us as well — they become important and cherished items. One of our biggest fears is our precious child being forgotten, so remembrances become crucial to us. At the same time, material things become less important- a lost 2 carat diamond is laughed off, because after all — it is only a thing, and we know what true loss is.

Holidays are especially difficult — one more celebration my son/daughter is missing. It can be even harder for us when everyone is gathered together and happy and laughing as if this most horrific of tragedies never happened. We often have to change our traditions and rituals after the loss of a child, because we can't bear to hang the stockings we always hung, or sing the songs we always sang when he/she was here with us. Mother's Day and Father's Day are devastating for us, even when we have other children. They are reminders that one of my children isn't here, and I am an incomplete mother or father.

Anniversaries are equally, sometimes more difficult — especially the anniversary of his/her death. Don't expect a lot of deep conversation or even adult-like behavior from us anywhere close to the time we lost our child. Do expect lots of over-the-top emotion, crying for no apparent reason, and a general withdrawal from the world around us. The one that so inconsiderately continues to turn and go on as if everything is still the same, when clearly it's not.

Our spiritual beliefs often undergo a dramatic change. We now have to rethink the God and universe that allowed this most terrible thing to occur. People say things to us like "God needed her in Heaven" and inside we scream "I needed her here more!!" What kind of God would place his needs over our own? It is this and the plethora of other questions we now have that very often leads us down a religious path that may be quite different from the one we were on.

Speaking of religion, we don't want to hear about your narrow miss and how God saved you or your loved one. Don't get me wrong, we are happy for you, but we have to wonder — why did God save you and not my innocent child? Why did your sister/brother/uncle/cousin receive a miraculous healing, while my child suffered and died? Your miracle only serves to make us angry and bitter at not having received our own.

We also don't want to hear you complain about how much trouble you are having with your son or daughter. What we wouldn't give to be having that kind of trouble with ours! Be quiet and be thankful that he/she is around for you to argue with.

If this list makes us sound selfish or cynical, it's because we are. We have been wounded more deeply than most people can even imagine, and it is a struggle for us to go on at all. We must do what we can to live out the rest of our lives with some modicum of sanity, and unfortunately for those of you that must live with us, it demands that we be so. Please don't make us feel guilty, for we are already burdened with a kind of guilt you can never fathom: the guilt of having failed to protect that which we were responsible for protecting; the person we treasured more than anything else in the world.



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