Double Whammy: Coping with the Death of a Spouse While Parenting a Grieving Child

Justin M. Yopp, PhD
Clinical Psychologist | Associate Professor
Co-Leader, Widowed Parent Program
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Moderated by Tina Barrett, EdD
Executive Director, Tamarack Grief Resource Center

April 25, 2019
Presented by Boeing

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You must go on.
I can't go on.
I'll go on.

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As a widowed parent, the challenges you face may be Overwhelming
As a widowed parent, the challenges you face may be

Exhausting

Relentless

Isolating
As a widowed parent, the challenges you face may be **Unique**

As a widowed parent, the challenges you face may be **Disorienting**
Understanding Your Grief

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JyOVKLR2pEs#action=share

The Challenges

1. Grieving the death of your spouse/partner

The Challenges

1. Grieving the death of your spouse/partner
2. Helping your children grieve
The Challenges

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2. Helping your children grieve
3. Being both Mom and Dad

All present on Day One

The Challenges

1. Grieving the death of your spouse/partner
2. Helping your children grieve
3. Being both Mom and Dad
4. Moving forward
Meeting The Challenges

The Challenges

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Grieving your spouse/partner

• All consuming at times
• Range of emotions, thoughts, behaviors
  • Avoid thinking of these as being “wrong”
• Looking back:
  • Memories of the time leading up to death or the death itself
  • Regrets / what ifs
Grieving your spouse/partner

- Marriage / relationship ended prematurely
- Search for meaning or fairness
- Constant reminders: wedding ring, pictures, closets, kids
- No timetable
- Grief bursts – these are normal

The Challenges

1. Grieving the death of your spouse/partner
2. Helping your children grieve
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4. Moving forward with

Helping Your Children Grieve

- You don’t have to be perfect
  - (chances are, you weren’t perfect before)
- There is no expectation that you’ll get this just right
- You do have the greatest influence
  - (This is good news, by the way)
Helping Your Children Grieve

• Familiarize yourself with developmental norms
  • Infants & Toddlers
  • Pre-school age
  • School-age
  • Teenagers
  • Young adults

Helping Your Children Grieve

• Two main things:
  1. Consistency at home

Helping your Children Grieve

• Two main things:
  1. Consistency at home
  2. Emotionally available
Helping Your Children Grieve

• Consistency at home
  • Establish and maintain routines
    • (ha!)
  • Keep discipline consistent
    • (ha, again!)

Helping Your Children Grieve

• Emotionally available
  • Communicate, communicate, communicate
    • Avoid conspiracy of silence
    • Be honest
    • Talk about Mom or Dad
    • Happy-Mad-Glad-Sad game

Helping Your Children Grieve

• Emotionally available
  • Nurture continued bonds
  • Holidays, anniversaries
  • Enlist friends and family
  • Shared struggle
The Challenges
1. Grieving the death of your spouse/partner
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3. Being both Mom and Dad
4. Moving forward with

Being both Mom and Dad
• It's. All. On. You.
• "The relentless fatigue of being an 'only' parent"
• Filling new roles/responsibilities
  • The “fun” parent, the “strict” parent, the “___” parent
  • "But Dad would have let me do it!"

Being both Mom and Dad
• Even in good times, parenting is a humbling endeavor...
  • Be fair with yourself
    • Again, you don't have to be perfect
    • The “Good Enough Parent”
The Challenges

1. Grieving the death of your spouse/partner
2. Helping your children to grieve
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4. Moving forward with

Moving Forward With

• You will move forward with
• You do not need to move on from
• In-laws (still in-laws?)
• Reminders: wedding ring; pictures; closets
• Clarify your priorities → live accordingly

Moving Forward With

• You don’t always have to be “last in line”
• Balance your needs with your children’s
• Embrace personal growth
• Reimagine new trajectories
• Be patient and fair with yourself
Moving Forward With

• Dating
  • “As it turns out, my desires didn’t die with my wife”
  • Doesn’t mean that you’re “over” your loss
  • Date when you are ready
  • Jigsaw puzzle vs. Rubik’s cube

Seek out support

• Find someone to talk with
• Other mothers/fathers
• School counselors
• Professional counseling

Resources
Resources

• Books and websites
• Grief camps
• Bereavement organizations
• Widowed Parent podcast (Jenny Lisk)

The Group
Seven Widowed Fathers Reimagine Life

• Blend of narrative and the latest findings in bereavement
• For any person coping with loss
• All of our proceeds go back to the Widowed Parent Program
Thank you

• TAPS
• Tina Barrett
• Our team at UNC (Don Rosenstein, Leeza Park)
• The hundreds of mothers and fathers who have chosen to participate in our studies

Questions?

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About the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing®

Launched in March 2018 through an alliance with HFA, the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing® serves as a resource and training center, providing programs for both professionals working in the field of grief and loss and the public.

Presented by Boeing

Upcoming TAPS Institute Programs

• June 20-21 — Helping Individuals and Families Coping with Grief: Best Practices for Bereavement Professionals
  Presenter: Kenneth J. Doka, PhD, MDiv

• July 30 — Spouses and Suicide: Finding Hope When the Unthinkable Happens
  Presenter: Shauna Springer, PhD
  Moderator: Kim Ruocco, MSW

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