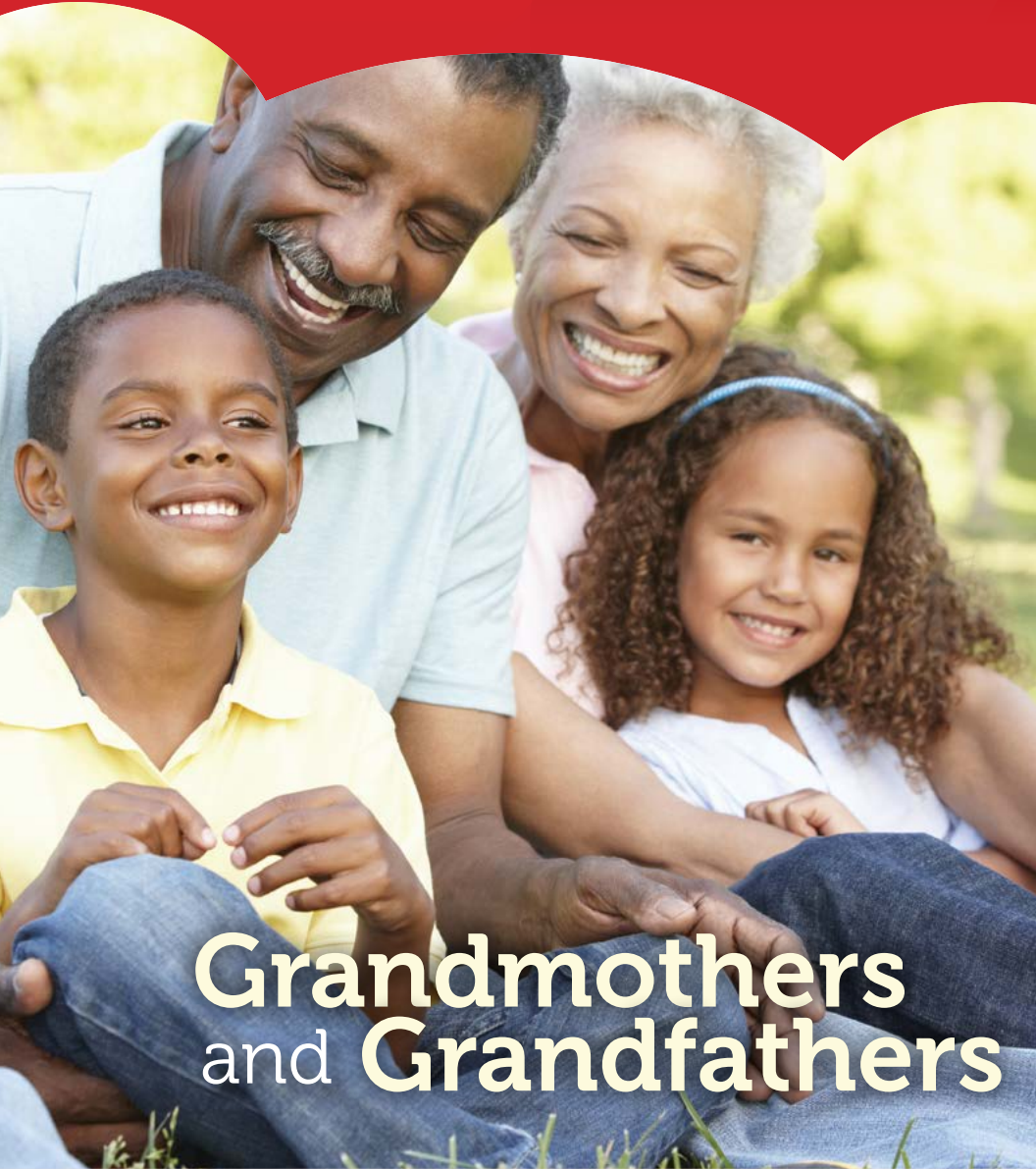




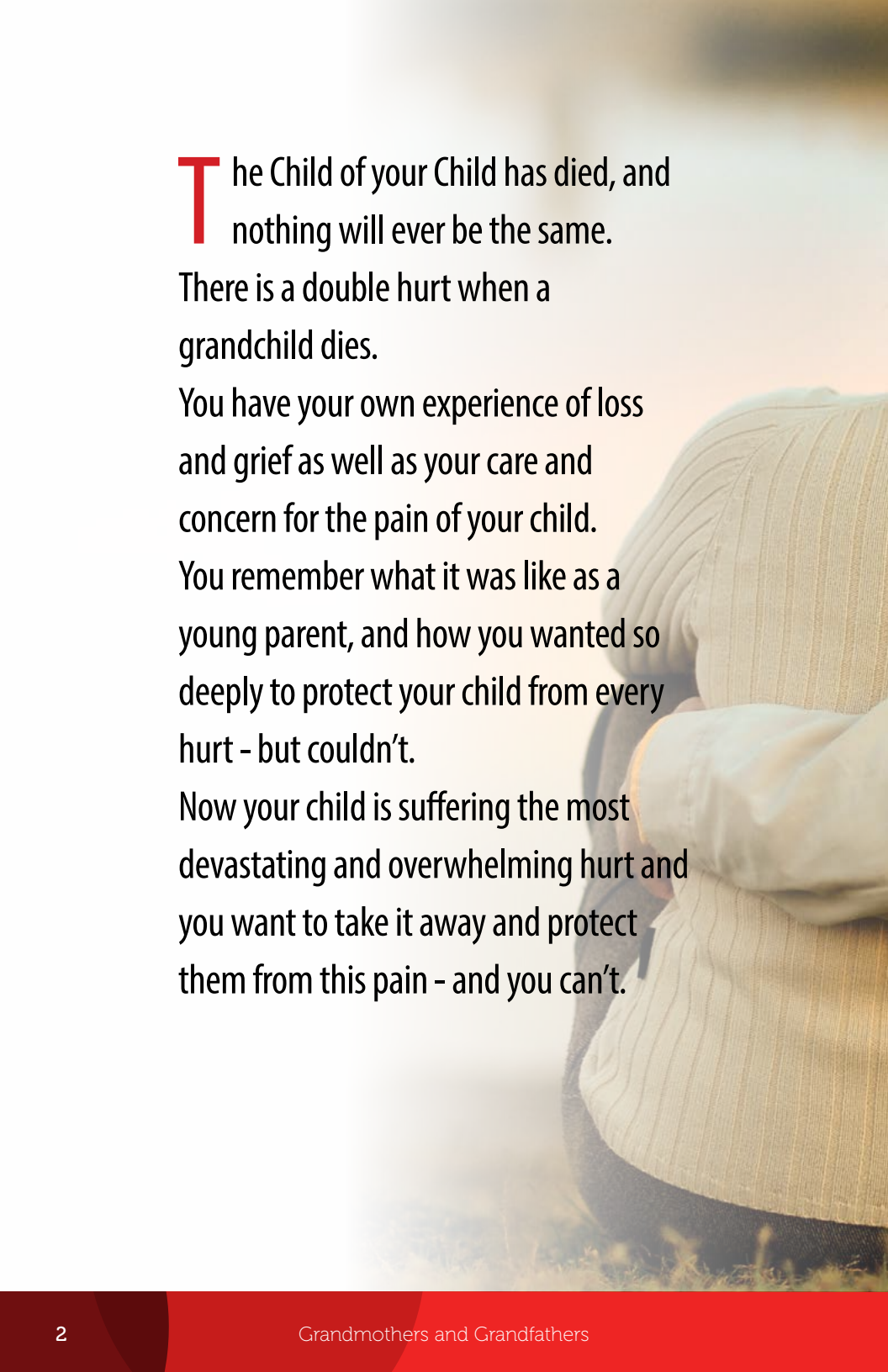
Children's National™

Chaplaincy Services



Grandmothers and Grandfathers

The Other Parents

A person wearing a white, ribbed sweater is seen from the back, hugging another person from behind. They are standing in a field with tall grass, and the background is a soft, hazy landscape under a bright sky. The overall mood is one of comfort and support.

The Child of your Child has died, and nothing will ever be the same.

There is a double hurt when a grandchild dies.

You have your own experience of loss and grief as well as your care and concern for the pain of your child.

You remember what it was like as a young parent, and how you wanted so deeply to protect your child from every hurt - but couldn't.

Now your child is suffering the most devastating and overwhelming hurt and you want to take it away and protect them from this pain - and you can't.



You are the Grandparents of a Grandchild Who Has Died

What are the ways that you would like to continue to remember your grandchild?

You can hold a celebration for their birthday. Donate flowers to your church or another organization in your grandchild's memory. Give a donation to a research or healthcare organization in your grandchild's memory. Write a letter to your grandchild about how you are feeling; what your hopes are for your grandchild now - how you miss your grandchild. Put it away in a special place - or tie it to a balloon and let it go. Holidays and special times like graduations and weddings and new births can be particularly difficult. Here, too, donations in your grandchild's name can be one way of including this child in the celebration. You might want to help other grandchildren remember too, with a memory tree, or a balloon release. Younger children can blow bubbles as a way of sending a wish to your grandchild who has died.

A memory tree is a bare branch that is painted brightly, placed in a stand and then you and others can tie pictures, stories of slips of paper, ribbons, etc on it as a way of telling about your feelings, hopes, and memories. You could also create one by drawing a tree shape on a large sheet of paper and then gluing objects to it.

List some ways you will want to remember and continue to create good memories of your grandchild.

Grandparents have special memories

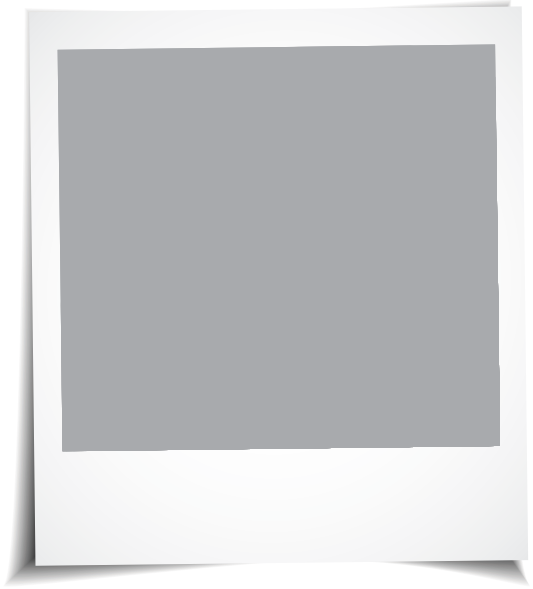
Place a small picture of your grandchild here and write down your favorite story about this child:

This is: _____

at age _____

Picture was taken _____

My favorite story about (_____) is:



We will suggest some ways you can be available to your children, but first let's focus on you.

We are very aware that when parents have a child die they not only lose this special person whom they love deeply, they lose a great deal of their future hopes and dreams. That's true for you, too.

You have had expectations for your relationship with your grandchild. Spending time with him/her, helping her/him to learn and grow, sharing special treasures and places and memories... Telling stories about his/her parents.

Perhaps you have planned to fix up a special room in your home for your grandchild. Or fix a play area in your yard.

Maybe you have felt that you could do things for your grandchild you were not able to do for your child.

There are other ways you uniquely experience your grief.

You may question whether you are still a "grandparent," especially if the child who died was your only grandchild. The answer is - yes.

You are a grandparent of a child who has died.

But friends a family may not know whether to still refer to you as grandparent - or they may be uncomfortable with your grief, even expecting you to subdue it and to "be strong" for your child - or they may be insensitive to your grief, asking you questions about how your grandchild died (out of real care or curiosity) because they don't want to ask your child.

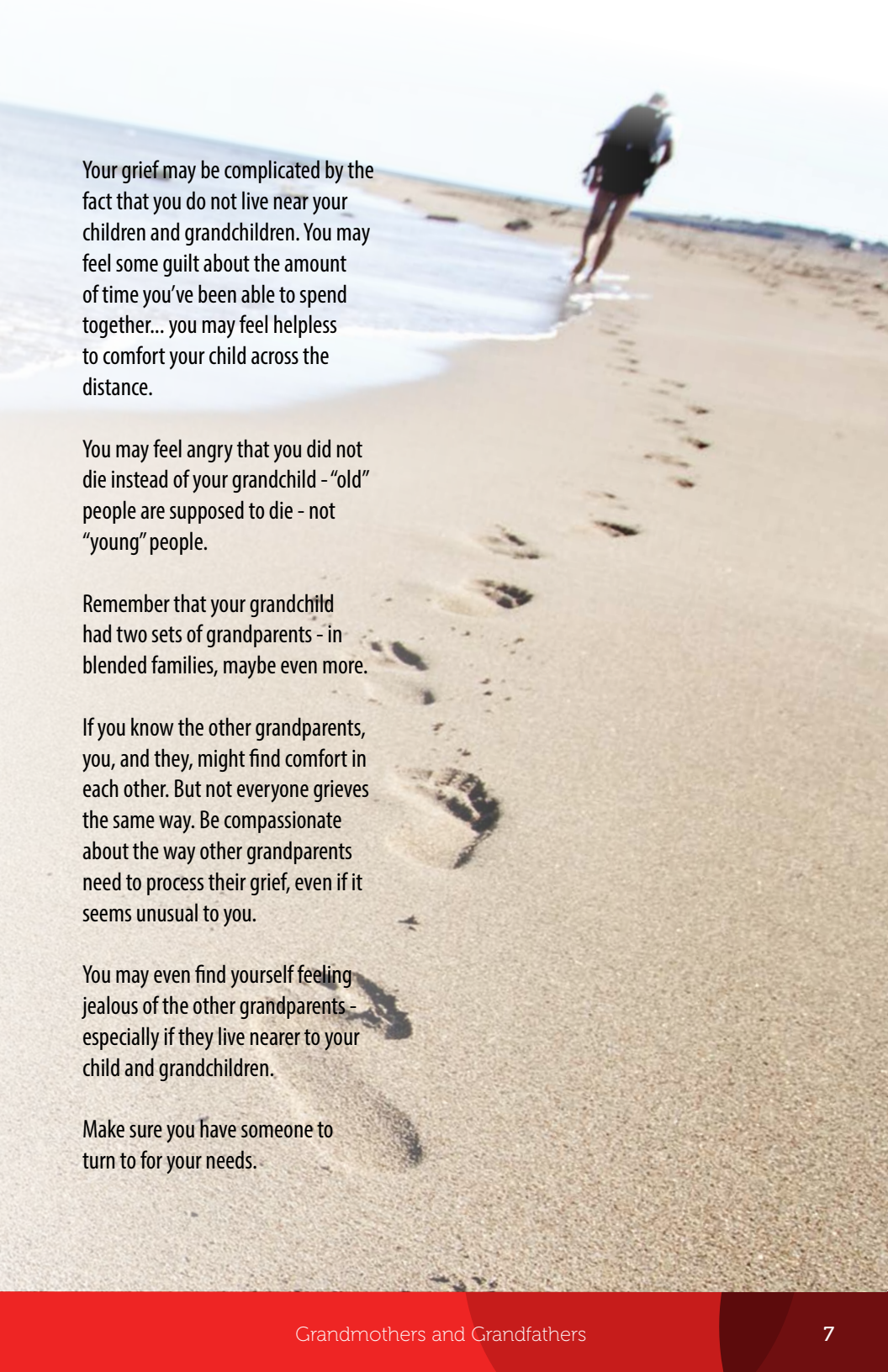
If this happens you may want to respond in one of several ways:

"Thank you for your concern." (then change the subject)

"Thank you for your concern. My own grief is so deep I find these very difficult questions/thoughts right now."

"Thank you for your concern. I could use a friend to talk to about my own grief."

Be sensitive to the reality that the persons who may be the most unresponsive to your grief are the child's parents - your child - because their own grieving takes so much of their attention.



Your grief may be complicated by the fact that you do not live near your children and grandchildren. You may feel some guilt about the amount of time you've been able to spend together... you may feel helpless to comfort your child across the distance.

You may feel angry that you did not die instead of your grandchild - "old" people are supposed to die - not "young" people.

Remember that your grandchild had two sets of grandparents - in blended families, maybe even more.

If you know the other grandparents, you, and they, might find comfort in each other. But not everyone grieves the same way. Be compassionate about the way other grandparents need to process their grief, even if it seems unusual to you.

You may even find yourself feeling jealous of the other grandparents - especially if they live nearer to your child and grandchildren.

Make sure you have someone to turn to for your needs.



**For more information, contact
Bereavement Coordinator
Children's National Medical Center
Washington, DC
202-476-3321
www.childrensnational.org**

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