

**Shanun-Klein, H (formerly: Kagan (Klein),H):**  
**THE READJUSTMENT MODEL OF PARENTAL BEREAVEMENT**

Adapted from: **Kagan (Klein), H. (1998). Gili's Book, A Journey into Bereavement for Parents and Counselors. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.**

ASSUMPTIONS

1. Parental bereavement is a unique form of grief.
2. Parental bereavement is not an illness, a disorder nor pathology and therefore there is no 'recovery' from, nor 'healing' or an end to it.
3. Parental bereavement is a normal constellation of reactions to an abnormal event.
4. Deep Sadness underlies parental grief, not Depression, an Anxiety Disorder or a PTSD.
5. Parental bereavement is best described as a non-linear process of readjustment to a reality of living with loss, of re-learning to live without the deceased child. This process is characterized by Inward Steps and Outward Steps taken simultaneously, not by Stages, Phases, or Tasks.
6. In this process, a new self emerges which has incorporated and internalized aspects of the deceased child.
7. Bereaved parents do not detach themselves from their deceased children, i.e., there is no 'final goodbye.'
8. Bereaved parents do not stop grieving, although the grief may vary in intensity. It is often unpredictable, but it is life long, as the process of readjustment is life long. There are no timetables in parental bereavement.
9. In time, the parent develops a 'dual-image' of his or her child: a 'real-image,' and a 'shadow-image.'
10. A turning point in the bereavement process occurs when the parent identifies a mission – reconstructs a new meaning, a new reason, passion, or focus to live for.
11. In order to understand a parent's grief, we must take into consideration this individual's social, cultural and spiritual worlds, history, beliefs, and values. It is an individual process beyond gender and other stereotypes.

**THE READJUSTMENT MODEL OF PARENTAL BEREAVEMENT - INWARD and OUTWARD STEPS**

- Inward and Outward Steps characterize the process of Readjustment to living with loss.
- Both types of Steps are defined from the bereaved parent's perspective and according to her/his intention.
- Inward Steps - private; the parent may/may not be fully aware of them. e.g., re-running in her/his mind life story.
- Outward Steps - visible; the parent connects to outside world intentionally. e.g., talking to people.
- Both Steps are taken simultaneously.

**DEEP SADNESS**

Deep Sadness is the underlying constellation of emotions, cognitions, and behaviors characteristic to parental bereavement. Parental bereavement is a normal set of reactions to an abnormal event.

Cause: Always known - death of child.

Main Characteristics:

- Life long
- Varied intensity
- Focus on the deceased child (thoughts, dreams, hearing/feeling/seeing sensations of child's presence)
- Usually a strong need to talk about the deceased child and the traumatizing experience

- A wish to join the child - may/may not indicate suicidality
- A search for meaning ("Why?")
- A spiritual search
- Temporary/permanent changes in beliefs, habits/behaviors - sleeping, eating, work, interactions with people/environment
- Need to commemorate child
- Turning points - finding a goal/goals to live for (emergence of a new self)
- Best treatment: Emotional support (family, friends, counseling); self-help
- Medication not recommended.

## **FOR PROFESSIONALS WHO WORK WITH BEREAVED PARENTS - FACTORS TO CONSIDER:**

1. The symbolic meaning of the deceased child's life to the parent.
2. That child's personality.
3. That child's dreams and aspirations, and the parent's dreams for that child.
4. That child's age and history.
5. The relationships with this child.
6. The parent's outlook on life before the loss.
7. The parent's aspirations, achievements and failures.
8. Other losses the parent had, and how reacted to each one.
9. The parent's premonitions about that child's death.
10. Reactions to premonitions that the child might have had, may also help in identifying sources for guilt or even hope, depending on the parent's beliefs.
11. Reactions to previous losses, types of losses, and previous trauma, as indicators of resiliency.
12. Temperament, mental and physical health of the parent prior to, during, and after the death of the child, will assist in making a more accurate observation of the parent's condition.
13. Distinguish among: Depression unrelated-to bereavement, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Anxiety Disorder, and Deep Sadness. These distinctions are crucial in order to provide the most appropriate help to the bereaved parent.
14. Do not suggest medication for Deep Sadness. Medication may mask the grief reactions, and hinder the healthy progression of Inward and Outward Steps.
15. The bereaved parent has to feel the pain to its fullest. Do not attempt to "take it away" from her or him.
16. Family structure, relationships and conflicts, and Social support, may be identified as an important cause for the parent's resiliency; their survival and their striving to live.
17. Cultural context of the loss, Spiritual beliefs and practices, may determine the process of readjustment, its pace, the quantity and quality of the Inward and Outward Steps to be taken.
18. Employment, litigation, and financial situation, are important factors affecting the process of readjustment.
19. Acknowledge the normalcy and uniqueness of parental grief.
20. Be a 'companion' on a journey rather than an 'expert' observer; Consider special ethical guidelines.
21. Provide more facilitative/supportive counseling than analysis and therapy.
22. Allow yourself to be taught by grief, yours and that of your client's.
23. Help your clients in finding new meaning in their lives to turn 'surviving' into 'living.'