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Local Grief Expert: Supporting a Grieving Family

*In light of the ongoing coverage of the hit-and-run that resulted in the death of Palisadian **David Pregerson**, the Post asked Palisadian grief specialist **Susan Whitmore** for tips on how to support a family going through the devastating loss of a child. Read more about Whitmore in this week's Pali Life section.*

The death of a child is every parent's worst fear, and when it happens in a close-knit community like Pacific Palisades, the information spreads quickly and impacts the community as a whole. When the death has been traumatic and public, people often feel grief.

I remember when **Teak Dyer** was murdered in the Palisades. I cried for three days until I finally wrote a letter to her mother about how sorry I was. This was long before my daughter Erika died, and I understood the death of a child.

People will often question their own feelings of grief, "Why should I be feeling sadness and grief feelings? It did not happen to me." This is a normal, compassionate response to something that you feel would affect you in such a deep way. So don't deny your feelings and find an outlet for them, even talking to a grief professional if you need to.

To lose a child and have to deal with everything that comes with that is hard enough; to lose a child in the public eye is even harder. People should really try to reach into a deep place in their hearts and refrain from making any judgments or negative comments. The family needs love, compassion and empathy, not judgments and speculations.

Watch what you say in public about the family, especially when there is still so much unknown. You can be a part of the lovely extension of compassion and empathy for a family, or you can be a part of traumatizing them even more. Please choose the former. - *Susan Whitmore*