

HORIZON

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Living with loss

The Gift of Compassion

By Erin Webb, Bereavement Coordinator/Counselor

Being compassionate with yourself is one of the most important things you can do while working through the grieving process. We often hold ourselves to unrealistically high standards in life and this is also true in grief. Grieving people are told to be strong and for many this could mean don't cry or remain in control of your emotions or continue to function in your day-to-day life as you always did. It is even harder to be compassionate with yourself when society is holding you to such high and unrealistic standards.

Sometimes there is a need to make room for self-care, especially if you have put most of your attention on others throughout your life. Why is it that we are able to be kind and compassionate to family, friends, neighbors and even strangers, but fall short treating ourselves the same? Not everyone exhibits this pattern of behavior, but it seems a large number of people seeking the help of bereavement counselors at the Hospice of the Piedmont could benefit from showing themselves more compassion during this difficult time. Now, this **does not** mean disregarding friends and family and their feelings. It **does** mean treating yourself as well as you would treat them.

People can be hard on themselves in many ways. Some people have the tendency to compare their grief process to others' and often believe that the others are "doing better with their grief" than they are. It is almost impossible to fairly compare one loss to another because there are so many factors that impact how one might grieve, such as the type of relationship. Was the relationship close, distant, conflicted, or inseparable? There is your personality type. You might be extroverted or introverted.

You may be more or less emotional or comfortable sharing your feelings. You may already have tendencies toward anxiety, depression, substance abuse or you might be extremely resilient, more easily seeing the positive side of life and feeling hopeful. You might experience multiple deaths at one time or other types of losses, such as loss of job, divorce, children moving away, financial losses, loss of home, loss of your own health to name a few. The way your loved one died will also impact your grief journey. Was it sudden or expected? Was there a drawn-out illness? Do you perceive the death itself as peaceful or more traumatic? There is no set time for how long it takes to begin feeling better after a loss. The time it takes is unique to each

individual. How deeply you will experience feelings and how your grief might appear to others are also things that vary from person to person. Some people are more outwardly emotional than others. There is no one right way to grieve.

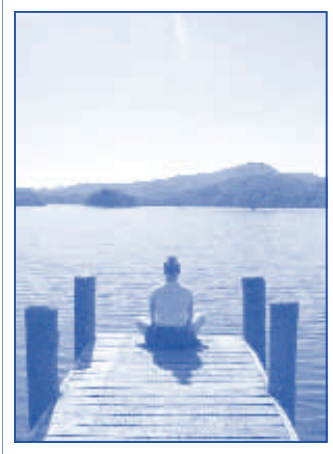
Another way we can be hard on ourselves is by not accepting the feelings that arise within us or

judging the feelings as wrong. People might believe that some feelings are more acceptable than others. This often results in avoidance of the "unacceptable feelings" and stuffing them down, which can lead to even more difficulties down the road. Sadness seems to be an appropriate grief feeling, while others such as anger, relief, and happiness are less acceptable to some people. Anger can be an uncomfortable feeling for people in general. And it can be extra hard to be angry at someone who is dead or to be angry at God. It is important to express the range of feelings that your loss brings forth, not just the sadness. Your loved ones were human and your loved ones had faults as well as positive attributes. And it is a tribute to them to

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The Gift of Compassion (continued from page 1)



remember them as they really were, whole and flawed human beings.

It is also important to note that feelings just don't seem to make sense sometimes. We accept the idea that most people don't choose to leave this earth and leave their loved ones behind, yet, sometimes, we want to scream at them for leaving. These feelings may seem irrational but they are completely normal feelings that need to be released. Feelings are neither right nor wrong. What we feel may not be under our control, but what we do with these feelings is. We have found that it is beneficial for most people to find safe and healthy outlets to express feelings.

Many people feel guilt for experiencing feelings of relief or happiness. Relief can come about after a long or painful illness and it is normal to feel this way when suffering ends. Happiness is what we hope for the bereaved to be able to feel again. And when it comes, people sometimes feel that it is just not right. "My loved one is dead, how can I be happy?" To have moments of happiness does not mean that you are not sad or grieving. Happiness, sadness and grief can co-exist. We encourage the bereaved to let themselves experience and express all the feelings that arise. They are all expressions of the love and the loss that exists. An important part of healing is to allow and make room for moments of joy.

Compassion for yourself is needed when looking at how you will meet the demands of day-to-day life as you grieve. The bereaved often expect to continue to be able to meet the many obligations they were meeting prior to the loss. Be aware that grieving is work and it can be mentally, emotionally and

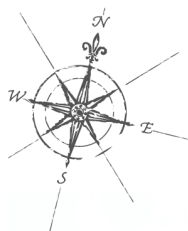
physically taxing. You might need more rest. You might need to take time off from work, or pull back from volunteer obligations. And, of course, there are times when taking it easy is not an option. But, it is wise to actively look for areas where you can decrease workload or obligations, at least for the time being, as you adapt to your loss.

Another way we can be hard on ourselves is to expect that we can deal with day-to-day tasks as well as our grief without the help of anyone. The kind thing to do is to spend some time thinking about what you want and need right now. And then take the next step and ask for help with these things. This is easier said than done for many people. Some of you have coped adequately, depending on no one but yourself. You might have been encouraged to do so throughout your life and you may even be proud of this strength. But, most people find that grieving the loss of a loved one is not something easily done on their own, even if they have been very independent in the past.

Many of you had the opportunity to show love, kindness and compassion to your loved one as he or she was ill and dying. Now it is time for you to receive a similar love, kindness and compassion from yourself and those around you. Just as your loved one suffered, you are experiencing your own kind of suffering now. Helen Keller shared, "Although the world is full of suffering; it is also full of overcoming it." And it will be with compassion that you, too, will overcome.

Ideas for Developing a Compassion for Self:

- ◆ Avoid comparing your grief journey to the grief journey of others, or your prior experiences with grief.
- ◆ Avoid judging your feelings by reminding yourself that feelings are neither right nor wrong.
- ◆ Allow yourself to feel and express the full range of feelings that arises within you.
- ◆ Lighten your workload and obligations to others at this difficult time, if possible.
- ◆ Think about your wants and needs.
- ◆ Allow yourself to accept the help of others.
- ◆ Allow room for moments of joy.



BEREAVEMENT CALENDAR OF EVENTS

ADVANCE REGISTRATION REQUIRED

For more information and to register, please call 434-817-6900 or 800-975-5501.

Bereavement Support Groups

Bereavement Support Group for Adults

Thursdays, January 14 - March 4, 1:00 - 2:30pm

Meet for eight consecutive weeks to learn about the grieving process and be with others who are grieving. These groups are for adults who have experienced the death of a loved one and three months have passed since the death.

Remembering Our Children

Ongoing Group meets the 1st and 3rd Mondays of the month, 6:00 – 7:30pm

If you are a parent or family member who has experienced the death of a child, we invite you to join us for education about grief and loss, support, and healing.

Men's Breakfast Club — *NEW!*

The 3rd Thursday of each month at 8:30am beginning October 15th

Location: the English Inn of Charlottesville, 2000 Morton Drive (behind Emmett Street Bodo's Bagels)

Be a part of this social gathering for men. Gain support through conversation and connection with other men experiencing the ups and downs of grief. (A breakfast buffet will be available for \$10.00 plus tax, payable by attendee at the front desk.)

Monthly Drop-In Support Group — *NEW!*

The 2nd Monday of each month, 5:30 – 7:00pm beginning October 12th

An open bereavement support group for any adult who has been affected by the death of a friend or family member. This is an opportunity to discuss grief topics and receive support from others going through the grief process.

Bereavement Workshops

Beginning Your Grief Journey

Join us for an evening of education and sharing for the newly bereaved. We will introduce basic grief concepts and provide time to begin to share the story of your loss in a group setting.

October 7: Albemarle County, 6:00 - 8:00pm

October 14: Augusta County, 1:00 - 3:00pm

October 21: Buckingham County, 1:00 - 3:00pm

October 28: Madison County, 1:00 - 3:00pm

November 4: Albemarle County, 1:30 - 3:30pm

November 11: Orange County, 6:00 - 8:00pm

November 18: Fluvanna County, 6:00 - 8:00pm

November 18: Greene County, 6:00 - 8:00pm

December 2: Albemarle County, 6:00 - 8:00pm

December 9: Nelson County, 1:00 - 3:00pm

December 16: Louisa County, 1:00 - 3:00pm

Holiday Grief Workshop Series:

Tuesdays, 6:00 – 7:30pm

November 17th & 24th and December 1st & 8th

We are offering a four-week series of group sessions, designed to provide support to adults and provide opportunities for participants to connect with others who are grieving during the holiday season.

11/17: Holiday Grief Survival Guide

12/1: Honoring the Memory of Loved Ones

11/24: Traditions: Keeping the Old or Creating New

12/8: Looking Toward a New Year

Journeys Program

Journeys Support Group

Thursdays, 5:00 – 6:30pm

Our 6-week sessions provide an opportunity for children, teens and their parents/guardians to receive grief education and support from a bereavement counselor, art therapists, and Journeys volunteers. (Dinner will be provided.)

IN CASE OF INCLEMENT WEATHER, EVENTS WILL BE CANCELLED IF THAT COUNTY'S SCHOOLS HAVE BEEN CLOSED.

CALENDAR UPDATED REGULARLY ON WEBSITE: WWW.HOPVA.ORG.

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*Dedicated to grief education, support,
and the offer of hope.*

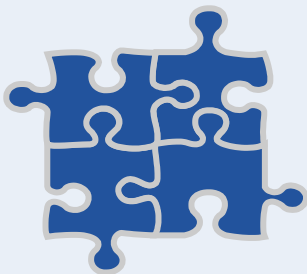
Myth

The longer and closer the relationship with the deceased, the harder it is to cope with the loss.



Reality

No matter how long or close the relationship with the deceased, each loss has its own challenges and each grief experience is filled with complexities and opportunities for growth.



Self-Care Tip

Take note of the ways in which you are moving forward in your grief process, no matter how small the steps might be. Give yourself generous praise for what you have survived, and how you have managed stressful situations and challenging transitions.



Adapted from San Diego Hospice and Palliative Care's "Living With Grief Series."