

HORIZON

Living with loss

A PUBLICATION OF HOSPICE OF THE PIEDMONT

Facing Grief with Commitment and Courage

Committing to the search for meaning in the face of adversity is an important step in adjusting to life without your loved one. Telling yourself that you can not survive or that life is pointless will reinforce hopelessness. Instead, search for ways to find strength and courage in each moment.

While it is important to acknowledge despair or hopelessness, it is also important to remind yourself that you can, and will, survive. Tell yourself, "This is really painful, but I am determined to find direction and meaning in the midst of this challenge." Begin to take pride in your ability to cope with the grief that is now yours.

This approach cultivates hope in the midst of turmoil. Your attitude is the key. If you consider your pain a negative burden you must escape from, you will find yourself feeling anxious and depressed. If you view grief as the cost of the investment you freely made when you chose to care, then grief turns into a healing process that you can own for yourself. The price of love is the possibility of loss. You do not need to regret the time you chose to love, however brief it was.

Because grief involves coming to terms with the past, it gives you the opportunity to reflect on where you have been in your life. Those who have died

shaped you into the person you are; they also left behind a part of themselves. The grieving process allows you to reflect on memories and gifts your loved one has given you, and to consider how to use them in the future.

In order to make constructive changes, you must first accept reality. New meaning evolves gradually through the affirmation of your beliefs and through the expansion of your perspective. Although the future is always uncertain, you can take a courageous first step by facing your future with hope instead of fear.

Excerpted from San Diego Hospice and Palliative Care's Living With Loss Series

The Journeys Program

The Journeys program is designed for children and teens (4-18 years old) who are affected by the serious illness or the death of a loved one. Our registered art therapists provide grief support and education using art and other creative means.

Do you know a child or teen who could benefit from Journeys? Call us today at 434-817-6900.



Do Children Grieve?

By Helen Fitzgerald

Do children grieve? At what age is a child capable of grieving? How can we, as adults, help our children when some personal tragedy has occurred? These are all good questions that people frequently ask. Even though we were all children once, we have difficulty remembering what it was like to be a child, wholly dependent on the decisions of others. How children are affected by major events in their lives--for example, death or divorce--is something adults wonder about but are never certain they understand.

Do children grieve? In their desire to shield children from pain and unpleasantness, many adults want to believe that children adjust with relative ease to the death of a loved one. But over my career I have worked with thousands of children who have lost parents, siblings, and beloved grandparents, and there is no question in my mind that even young children do, indeed, grieve.

It would be a great help to parents if kids would be open about their grief, but children generally do what they think

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their parents want them to do. If saying nothing about their grief is what they believe is expected of them, they will express it in other, less obvious ways, leaving the parents puzzled about their behavior and wondering what to do about it. If a major loss has occurred and a child seems to be "taking it all in stride," that may be the first sign of trouble.

What I have found is that children's grief, once it has been glossed over so they can "get on with their lives," begins to show itself in various ways. Seemingly unrelated behavioral problems begin to appear, such as fights at school, day-dreaming, or bad grades. Moodiness, fits of temper, overeating, or lack of appetite are other possible signs that a child is grieving.

It is natural that parents want to protect their children from the effects of personal tragedy, but the best way to do this is to help them express their grief, not deny it. Time and again, I have seen misbehaving youngsters--especially boys--brighten up and start responding with enthusiasm when they were allowed to talk about their losses and to express



At Journeys thru the Seasons Spring 2008 Camp, a camper prepares a message to her loved one, prior to the balloon release closing ceremony.

Far from protecting children, the steps that parents consciously or unconsciously take to minimize their children's grief may make it far worse than it has to be. Discouraged from saying how they really feel, excluded from family events (like funerals), left to pretend that nothing has happened, children feel isolated, abandoned, and angry. If their grief remains unresolved, it can have very long-term effects, even affecting their adult lives. I have worked with many adults

lecturer, puts it this way: "If a child is old enough to love, that child is old enough to grieve." After all, even very young children are able to feel the void in their lives when a loved one is gone. And even very young children will pick up the emotions of those caring for them, sensing that something is amiss. Parents may want to believe that there is no real grief there, but failing to deal openly with a child's loss can be, and often is, harmful to the child.

Much as we hate to think so, death is an inevitable part of life. Much as we would like to, we cannot shield our children from grief and loss. When children face the loss of a loved one, parents have a responsibility to see that their kids are not made to fend for themselves. Grief is too important to be left to chance.

Excerpts taken from an article that appeared originally on www.beliefnet.com, "the leading website for faith, spirituality, inspiration and more." Used with permission. All rights reserved.

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their grief openly. Girls can present a different problem. They may not show the aggression that boys show, but they are more likely to reveal their grief through dour moods, eating disorders, or even the loss of friendships. Their lives begin to return to normal once their grief has been acknowledged and they have been given ways to express it.

suffering the effects of unresolved grief from childhood.

Bereaved children need the adults in their lives to understand that their grief is real and to show them how to express it constructively.

At what age is a child capable of mourning the death of a loved one? Dr. Alan Wolfelt, a well-known author and

Keeping Lines of Communication Open

Helping family members and friends understand what you need as you are grieving will assist you tremendously. To do so generally requires open communication, patience, and acknowledgement of your own needs. Here are some suggestions on how to keep the lines of communication open:

- Accept that each family member grieves in a unique way; no two people will feel exactly the same or need exactly the same things.
- Recognize that your family and friends are also experiencing loss, including the loss of your time, energy, or attention. When they can not or will not support you, remember you can call on other resources including friends, clergy, support groups, and professional counselors.
- Identify two or three things you need most from your family. For example,

you may need someone to listen to memories, someone else to help you go through your loved one's belongings, and someone else to teach you how to do your tax return.

- Make a list of family members and friends, divided into two columns:

Column 1: Those who are good at listening (who you could call when you need a shoulder to cry on).

Column 2: Those who are good at practical action and problem-solving (who you could call for a ride to the store or help with paperwork).

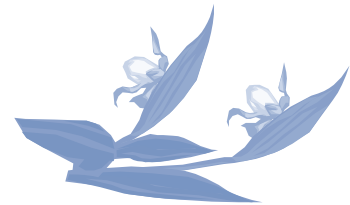
Some people may appear on both lists. Place each person's phone number or e-mail address next to his or her name. Then, when you have a need, refer to your list and choose the most appropriate person for the situation.

- Share your needs openly with family and friends. State them simply, specifically, and clearly: *I need someone to*

help me sort through my mother's clothes and thought you would be a good person to help me. Would you be available next week?

- When others are not meeting your needs, try to communicate directly without blaming: Instead of saying *You are making me feel worse*, say *I am feeling sad today and I need you to listen.*
- Do not expect others to read your mind. Communicate when your feelings and needs change: *These days I have more hope and energy, and I'd like to go to a funny movie. Are there any you recommend?*

Excerpted from San Diego Hospice and Palliative Care's Living With Loss Series



Bereavement Services at Hospice of the Piedmont

Grieving the loss of a loved one is a natural part of healing.

Hospice of the Piedmont's Bereavement Services help the bereaved understand the grief process and provide support that encourages healthy adjustment to loss. Services are available, following the death of a loved one, to the community at large and to the family and friends of hospice patients free of charge. Bereavement Services include:

- Mailings of educational and supportive material, reminders of upcoming bereavement events, and a quarterly mailing of *Horizon*, a publication dedicated to grief education and support.
- Bereavement support groups where a small group of people gather weekly for eight consecutive weeks to learn

about the grieving process and be with others who are grieving.

- Educational and experiential workshops on grief-related issues to aid coping.
- Short-term grief counseling provided by bereavement counselors.
- Youth services provided through the *Journeys* program, where children and teens (ages 4–18 years old) receive support and grief education and use art as a tool for creative expression. Youth services include individual sessions, on-going support groups and bereavement camps and retreats throughout the year for children and teens (age requirements vary for each event).
- Interfaith memorial services held to remember loved ones who have died

and honor those who are living.

- Referrals to additional resources and counseling services available in the community.
- Educational presentations on grief and loss issues to community groups and organizations.

Those interested can take part in just one or all of our services. Bereavement counselors are available to help you decide how Hospice of the Piedmont can best help you through this journey called grief.

For more information, to register for an event, or to get on our mailing list, please call the Hospice of the Piedmont office at: 434-817-6900 or 1-800-975-5501.

Bereavement Support

Groups are open to the
community and free of

charge. Please see the

Bereavement Calendar

or call the Bereavement

Department for further

information and to

register: 434-817-6900

or 800-975-5501

Fall Family Day

Food, Fun and
Activities for
Everyone!

**Saturday October 4, 2008
at Camp Holiday Trails**

For families who have been affected by the death of a loved one;

All ages welcome

(Children must be accompanied by parent or guardian)

Families will participate in activities and creative expression
which will encourage bonding and communication,
while memorializing their loved one.



For more information contact
434-817-6900 or 800-975-5501

www.hopva.org

