

HORIZON

A PUBLICATION OF HOSPICE OF THE PIEDMONT • SPRING 2009

Living with loss

Does Everyone React This Way?

One of the most common questions received at the Hospice of the Piedmont Bereavement Department from the bereaved is, “Am I going crazy?” And one of the most valuable gifts given is the reassurance that what they are going through is a normal and healthy grieving process.

Grief is a deeply personal and complex experience. Some reactions are common to most people: crying, difficulty concentrating, lethargy, and sadness. However, grieving takes place in each person’s own way and time. Often, the first reaction to the death of someone is emotional and physical shock. There is a disbelief that the person has died. Shock is the body’s natural anesthesia that protects griever from overwhelming pain. Shock leaves griever feeling numb and bewildered.

As the shock wears off, griever begin to feel the impact of the loss. Behaviors may seem unfamiliar and unlike the behaviors seen before the death occurred. Difficulty with sleep, changes in appetite, feelings of panic, moments of irritability, and a lack of interest in life are all common. Some days, griever have so little energy that even getting out of bed seems difficult.

An increasing awareness of what the loss means in the life of the individual can bring an upwelling of feelings that can be tough to understand. Some griever feel powerless to relieve the pain. Feelings of helplessness, anger, guilt, loneliness, and fear are common, as well as the need to cry and talk. It takes tremendous courage to feel the depth of any loss, whether the relationship was close and full of love or more difficult or detached.

One reaction that is sometimes hard to understand, and admit, is that of relief. Relief is a natural and common reaction. It does not mean a lack of caring for the person who has died. There can be relief because the deceased is no longer

suffering. There can also be feelings of relief from the demands, responsibilities, and pressures that accompanied caregiving.

Because death can seem senseless, many griever search for a reason. At times, griever can turn on themselves. Bereavement counselors often hear, “If only I had stayed with him longer maybe he’d still be alive.” Some people even feel guilty that they are alive after a loved one has died. With the courage to admit these feelings comes the ability to challenge their reality and lessen their intensity.

Loneliness is often the worst problem for people who spent most of their time and did most things with the person who died. The loss of a unique and constant companion can bring about a feeling of emptiness. It is difficult not to have someone to talk to about the day’s events, your thoughts, or your feelings. Being alone can feel like a terrible punishment.

Although there is no specific time frame, the overwhelming ache of grief does gradually fade. The hurt does not disappear entirely, but the pain’s intensity will decrease. Griever discover that as they move forward through the grieving process that the loved one who has died can continue to have a place in their lives.



Becoming an Active Participant

Grief is a natural process that occurs when a loved one dies. Grief will affect people physically and emotionally, requiring active participation to work through it. While experiencing the pain, it is helpful to remember that this is a healing process that will gradually lead from acute emotion to a new and different future.

The passing of time eases the pain, but time alone is not enough. Active participation is required to move through the process. Time and hard work together will make the difference.

While a loss has a strong and lasting effect, grief does not have to be disabling forever. By drawing on inner resources, personal creativity and supportive relationships, the natural healing process will take place.



Healing is Demanding

Human beings naturally resist pain and the pain of grief is no different. In order to heal, griever are helped by releasing the pain. For some that work is in doing something practical and for others it may be talking or sharing. The more active part one takes in grief work, the more relief can be felt as time moves forward. Postponing pain does not reduce it. Ignoring grief or pushing it aside can jeopardize healing.

Unresolved issues can surface later and may bring with them many other problems, including physical symptoms. Finding appropriate ways to release feelings, such as sharing with a trusted friend, building a memorial or writing in a journal, will lead to a better understanding of one's responses to the death, what is needed to cope with the death, and what the future holds without the person who died.

Milestones and Landmarks

Every person's grief journey will follow a unique meandering path that has no time limit. While some people's paths may cross, no two paths will be exactly the same, even after the same loss. Twists, turns, and roadblocks are to be expected throughout the journey.



Most grief journeys, however, consist of similar milestones and landmarks. A healthy grief process typically includes the following milestones:

- Accepting the reality of the death.
- Making sense of how this loss has impacts the life of the bereaved.
- Experiencing, expressing and making meaning from the full range of thoughts and feelings.
- Commemorating the life that was lived and shared with the loved one.
- Making adaptive changes in life to accommodate for the loss.
- Exploring what gives meaning and purpose to life now.
- Reinvesting and finding joy in a new and different life.

Experiencing the milestones takes time and different milestones are often revisited throughout the journey. Recognizing these milestones brings awareness to the shifting understanding of the loss as well as ideas about how to live life after a loss. If you are looking for guidance or if you are looking for someone or a group of people to be with you throughout this journey please contact the Hospice of the Piedmont Bereavement Department to access bereavement services available to you, such as short term individual supportive counseling, bereavement support groups or educational workshops.

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



BEREAVEMENT CALENDAR OF EVENTS

For more information and to register for events please call 434-817-6900.

Calendar updated regularly on website: www.hopva.org.

SUPPORT GROUPS FOR ADULTS

Bereavement Support Group for Adults

Thursdays, June 11 — July 30, 2009

12:00 – 1:30pm

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 3^d

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.

BEREAVEMENT WORKSHOPS

Beginning Your Grief Journey Workshop

The first Wednesday of the month

6:00 — 8:00pm

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.

A Life Remembered: Creating a Remembrance Album

Tuesdays, 6:00 — 8:00pm, June 16, 23, & 30

Join us to learn how to put together photos and stories creating an album celebrating the life of your loved one(s). Complete just a page or two or an entire album that can be shared with family and friends now and passed on to future generations.

JOURNEYS PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN, TEENS AND THEIR PARENTS

Journeys Support Group

Thursdays, 5:00 — 6:30pm

Our 6-week sessions provide an opportunity for children and teens to meet with a Journeys art therapist and engage in creative self-expression as a means to explore their loss. At the same time, parents meet with a bereavement counselor for grief education and support. Each evening begins with dinner together.

Journeys Day Camp

Saturday, May 16, 8:45am until 5:00pm

We invite children ages 6 -14 to join us at Triple C Camp in Charlottesville to experience fun through arts & crafts, a challenge course, grief education, great food, parents' group, and a closing ceremony. *Please call or go online for an application. Application must be received by May 7 2009.*

5K RACE TO BENEFIT HOSPICE OF THE PIEDMONT

June 6, 8:00am

The Keswick Club hosts an annual 5k race to benefit Hospice of the Piedmont. Information and registration forms can be found at <http://charlottesville-track-club.org> or call Colette Long, Keswick Health & Wellness Director at 434-923-4319.

Our groups and workshops are free and open to all community members.

Please call ahead to register for all events.

All events (except Journeys groups & camps) will be held at our new location:

675 Peter Jefferson Parkway, Suite 300, Charlottesville

434-817-6900 • 800-975-5501

WWW.HOPVA.ORG



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and the offer of hope.*

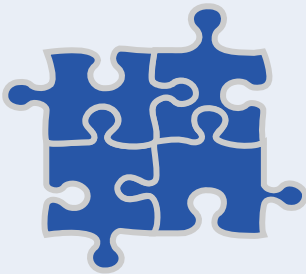
Myth

Being active and staying busy is the best strategy for those who are grieving.



Reality

It's not helpful to pressure yourself into excessive activity. However, a balance of healthy distractions in the midst of grief can temper the pain and provide momentary relief.



Self-Care Tip

Be aware of others' reactions. Many people do not know how to react appropriately to your grief. Some are more comfortable than others in responding to your situation. Be aware that people have different ideas not only about death, but also about how bereaved individuals should react. Be true to yourself and gently let others know if they say something inappropriate.

