

BEREAVEMENT NEWSLETTER

Perspectives On Loss And Grief

Volume One

Dear Friends of Hospice:

The loss of a loved one through death is one of the most difficult experiences we all must face at some point in our lives. However, most of us are not prepared for the journey of grief which faces us after the death. This journey can be frightening, painful, overwhelming, and lonely.

We acknowledge that the road ahead may be difficult for you. **During the next year, you will be receiving twelve “Bereavement Newsletters” from Hospice of Siouxland.** These mailings will address many issues surrounding the grief process. It is our hope that the newsletters will provide you with an understanding of grief as well as some practical suggestions that will aid you as you adapt to your loss and begin to heal.

Sincerely,
The Hospice Bereavement Team

WHY LEARN ABOUT GRIEF?

After the death of a loved one, we're often unsure how to “go on from here” or what to expect. Because the subject and practice of grieving are not yet widely discussed in our society, many of us do not know how to act, how to feel, or what to expect following the loss of a loved one. We don't know how to heal the hurt created by grief or how to live with it.

Understanding grief does not necessarily simplify grief or lessen the pain, but it can help lessen the additional confusion and anxiety that can make our grief process more difficult. Learning about grief can help us cope more effectively with our emotions and take steps toward healing and building a new life for ourselves.

*“If you can give something a name and a shape,
You can have power over it.
If it remains nameless and shapeless,
It will continue to have power over you.”
(Native American Proverb)*

GRIEF IS NORMAL

Grief is a normal and natural reaction to the death of a loved one. It can affect everything about us, including our emotions, thoughts, physical sensations, behavior, and spirituality.

NORMAL GRIEF REACTIONS

FEELINGS	THOUGHT PATTERNS
<p>Sadness Anger Guilt, self-reproach Anxiety Loneliness Helplessness Shock Yearning Relief Numbness Despair Hopelessness Bitterness</p>	<p>Disbelief Confusion Preoccupation Sense of presence (of the deceased person) Lack of concentration Lowered self-esteem Repeated review of the loss event Increase (or decrease) of dreams Search to understand implications of the loss A sense of depersonalization ("I walk down the street and nothing seems real, including myself.")</p>
PHYSICAL SENSATIONS	BEHAVIORS
<p>Hollowness in the stomach Tightness in the chest Tightness in the throat Oversensitivity to noise Shortness of breath Weakness of muscles Lack of energy Dry mouth Rapid heartbeat Muscle tension Fatigue Decreased resistance to illness</p>	<p>Sleep disturbances Appetite disturbances Absent-minded behavior Social withdrawal Dreams of the deceased Avoiding reminders of the loss Searching, calling out Sighing Crying Visiting places or carrying objects that remind of the deceased Treasuring objects that belong to the deceased Increase (or decrease) in activity</p>
SPIRITUAL	
<p>Emptiness (reason to live challenged) Destruction of beliefs/ideals Search for meaning Pessimism or idealism Experiences of connectedness/wholeness/rebirth Compassion</p>	

GRIEF IS UNIQUE

While the death of a loved one is an experience we all share, no two individuals will grieve the same way, even in the same family. Many factors can affect our response to loss, such as:

- * Prior grief experiences
- * Circumstances surrounding the death
- * Religious and cultural beliefs
- * Age of the deceased
- * Nature of the relationship
- * Support available to you
- * Gender
- * Your age

It is important to remember not to compare your grief to that of others. There are no rules or prescribed formulas for grieving. Do it in your own time and in your own way.

GRIEF IS A PROCESS

By Alan D. Wolfelt

“Helping Yourself Heal When Someone Dies”

When we have a painful experience, we want it to be over quickly; however, grief takes time as well as effort. There is no quick fix nor is there a timetable for grief, and it is common to feel impatient or frustrated because we are not progressing as quickly as we think we should.

Be patient with yourself. Adopt a “one-day-at-a-time” attitude that encourages you to grieve at your own pace. “Remember, grief is a process, not an event. Never forget that the death of someone loved changes your life forever. It’s not that you won’t be happy again. It’s simply that you will never be exactly the same as you were before the death.”

COMMON MYTHS/MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT GRIEF

- **“Grief happens in stages”**
Grief is a process--one that is usually not orderly
- **“You’ll get over it”**
You never “get over” the loss of someone you love. You can, however, learn to cope with your loss and integrate it into your life.
- **“Time will heal”**
Time alone does not heal. Working through your grief helps you heal.
- **“Keep busy. Don’t think”**
Ignoring grief will not make it go away. It is only through acknowledging and dealing with your loss that you can heal.

CHILDREN: THE FORGOTTEN MOURNERS

By Rabbi Earl A. Grollman

“Grieving Children: Can We Answer Their Questions?”

Death is a crisis which should be shared by all members of the family. Children are too often forgotten by grieving adults. Silence and secrecy deprive them of an important opportunity to

share grief. When, in our understandable heartache, we overlook their feelings, we heighten their sense of isolation. Reality is replaced with psychological defenses. Now, the youngsters need our help to sort out their emotions. When we discuss issues with our children openly, we enable them to live more freely.

Too often the feelings and perspectives of youngsters are overlooked because of the false assumption that young people are just too sensitive and cannot possibly cope with this difficult subject. Yet, in reality, children are confronted with death on a daily basis: in word and song, in the natural world of plants and animals, among their families and friends, and in the news as when a space shuttle explodes before their eyes.

Good mental health results, not the denial of tragedy, but from the frank acknowledgment of painful separation. One of the worst difficulties is youngsters' lack of understanding because of adult secrecy. Remember – a person is a person, no matter how small.

Other Resources You Might Find Helpful:

Living When a Loved One Has Died by Earl A. Grollman. A comforting, easy-to-follow book which acknowledges feelings and offers suggestions for healing.

When Will I Stop Hurting? Dealing With a Recent Death by June Cerza Kolf. This book provides helpful advice for those who are recently bereaved.

Talking About Death: A Dialogue Between Parent and Child by Earl A. Grollman. This book for children has a simple and direct style but covers a lot.

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