

BEREAVEMENT NEWSLETTER

THE ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY

Nearly a year has passed since the death of your loved one. As the anniversary of the death approaches, many survivors find themselves going over the details of the weeks leading up to that fateful day. At times it probably seems like forever since you saw your loved one, talked to or touched that special person. On the other hand, it seems like only yesterday.

You may be dreading the first anniversary or you may be anxious for it to arrive and know that you have been able to make it this far. Whatever your anticipation, the day will certainly be one with a flood of memories. It is important to be aware that many of your friends and family will NOT acknowledge this date. Some may think if they don't bring the date up (by sending a card or flowers or just in conversation), you won't remember it. For those who do remember, give them your thanks and show your appreciation.

In the past year you have faced many changes in your life.

PERHAPS YOUR LOSS HAS CAUSED YOU TO LOOK AT YOURSELF AND YOUR LIFE DIFFERENTLY. You may have new hopes and goals for your future. This is a good time to look over the past year and see how far you have come – where you are now – and where you would like to go from here.

PERHAPS you, and others around you, expected life to be “back to normal” after the first year. You may be discouraged because you are not “over it”. Sometimes these expectations are even expressed openly by people around you or implied by their attitude. Remind yourself that grief is a **PROCESS** with no particular timetable. Each person goes through this process at his or her own pace. Think back over the past year. You have come a long way.

PERHAPS your circle of friends is changing. Some of the old friends may not be as supportive as they once were. But there may be new friends who have come along or who you will yet meet. These new friends learn about you and accept you the way you are now.

PERHAPS the road ahead looks frightening and lonely. But as you look around, you can now see others who are on the same road. Truly, you are not alone. Is it time to reach out to others? They may need a hand to hold on to.

Even though grief does not end with the first anniversary, hopefully you can say that you have learned many lessons this past year.

PERHAPS you have learned to receive and accept the love and support of those around you.

PERHAPS you have learned that your tears and memories are healing.

PERHAPS you have learned that although your life is changed, there is still a joy in living.

PERHAPS you have learned that the memories which hurt so much can become a healing bridge from the past to the future.

PERHAPS you have learned that the pain of loss is diminishing and the purpose and meaning in your life is growing stronger.

PERHAPS you have learned to treasure each day and to show love to others.

PERHAPS you have learned to never, never take for granted the gift of life.

The first anniversary is an important milestone. Look backward at your progress -- Look at today and congratulate yourself for the major achievement of coming this far -- Look ahead to the opportunities that are yet to come.

People in mourning have to come to grips with death before they can live again. Mourning can go on for years and years. It doesn't end after a year; that's a false fantasy. It usually ends when people realize that they can live again, that they can concentrate their energies on their lives as a whole, and not on their hurt, and guilt, and pain.

(Elizabeth Kubler-Ross)

IDEAS FOR COMMEMORATING THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY

Maybe the death anniversary is a time for some special care and activities. Some people choose to set aside the day as a time to honor the life and memory of their loved one. You might choose to:

- Visit the cemetery. Take along a flower, a note, or a balloon bouquet.
- Light a memorial candle and extinguish it at bedtime.
- Plant a tree or flowers and watch them grow year after year.
- Make a donation to your church, temple, or favorite charity in memory of your loved one.
- Spend some time with family or friends talking about the good things you remember, the funny things, the jokes played, the special moments.

- Do something you enjoy – a walk along the river, a visit to a museum or art gallery, a drive in the country.
- Write a letter to your loved one, sharing the year’s happenings, the accomplishments you’ve made, what you have missed about him or her being gone.
- Go through old photo albums or videos and recall the special memories.

*You alone can do it,
but you cannot do it alone.
(O.Hobart Mowrer)*

Habits

I’m a creature of habit. The first thing I do each morning is go outside and pick up the paper from the curbside. I fix a bowl of cereal and settle down in my favorite chair to read and eat. Every now and again when I go outside, the paper has not been delivered. I can’t tell you how thrown off I feel. I can still have my usual meal in my comfy chair, but part of my routine has been disrupted, and I just don’t feel right.

When someone we love dies, our habits are thrown into disarray. Unlike the paper, which will arrive the next day as usual, this disruption is ongoing and irreparable. I’m reminded of the story of the centipede who was walking just fine until someone asked him how he did it, which brought him to a complete halt. The death of someone we love may bring us to a complete halt as well. We’re often aware of the big concerns we face but get tripped up by the little things, whether they are the habits of a lifetime or newly developed in response to caregiving or infirmity.

After a death, many of the things that we have done “normally” no longer apply. Eating meals may now be a solo activity; no need for that second cup or plate, yet how often we will automatically reach for them. We are used to turning to another to comment on a TV show, exclaim about the weather, or say good night. Now we have no one to reciprocate, and we can feel off-stride and be overcome by sadness.

At the supermarket, we find ourselves picking up things that we normally bought for our loved one. When meeting people, casual greetings and standard questions about partners or children no longer have an automatic answer.

Since automatic processes no longer apply, it will take energy to think through and develop new ones. This can be exhausting. When figuring out what or when to eat feels monumental, making larger choices seems beyond our capacities.

However, each day after the death, imperceptible new habits will develop, freeing energy for more activities. Each new action may bring a challenge, but there will be the reassurance of having gotten through the previous one. We can come up with acceptable responses to social questions and forgive ourselves behavioral lapses. When we recognize the inevitability of periodically bumping into old habits, we can deal with them better. As we learn to be easier with

our reactions and have new habits to count on, our world will again be a place where we can be comfortable.

Excerpts from an article in "Journeys"
By Genie Wild

*Let the joy of your loved one's life
begin to take the place of
the hurt and anger of the death.
(Dacie D. Sims)*

Other Resources You Might Find Helpful:

Roses in December by Marilyn Willett Heavilin. This book written by a mother who has lost three sons deals with loss, understanding grief, and finding your own roses in the dark days of your life.

Voices of the Grieving Heart. This is a collection of poems from Mike Bernhardt and 50 other grieving people.

What Will Help Me? How Can I Help? By Jim Miller. This double book divides into half. There are 12 things for the griever to do and 12 Insights for family and friends.

What Helps the Most . . . When You Lose Someone Close edited by Linus Mundy. This booklet of 101 brief insights is from "people who have been there".

BEREAVEMENT NEWSLETTER

Published by:

Hospice of Siouxland

224 Fourth Street

Sioux City, IA 51101

712-233-4144 / 1-800-383-4545

To contact a Bereavement Coordinator please call Hospice of Siouxland at the number listed above.

Written and Compiled by: Ruth E. Meisgeier, MSE and Pat Van Bramer, RN