

BEREAVEMENT NEWSLETTER

JOURNALING

Each month we try to give you information that will assist you as you cope with the loss that has occurred in your life. We realize that different coping strategies work for different people. Grief work is difficult and requires energy that you may not feel you have.

This information on journaling may sound okay to someone who has kept a journal before but may seem like a terrible chore to someone who hasn't. We hope that you will read the following information and consider giving it a try. We know that people who have tried it feel that it has been very beneficial as they struggle to make sense out of what they are experiencing. It is helpful when you cannot sleep or would like to talk but don't want to bother a family member or friend. Some thoughts or feelings may seem too overwhelming or confusing to try to share with anyone. Writing those things down on paper can help you to clarify them and make them seem less powerful.

Your journal can be any kind of notebook. There is no pressure to pay attention to grammar, spelling, punctuation or penmanship. Here are some suggestions for journal writing.

- Consider directing your writing to one person: yourself, your loved one, a fictional friend, or God.
- Record your ideas, feelings, and impressions – not just events.
- Write your thoughts in the form of a letter to your loved one.
- Wait a few weeks before reading your journal entries. You may be surprised at the progress you have made.
- Try using any of the following as sentence beginnings:
 - * I wish I could have told you . . .
 - * I wish we could have . . .
 - * Not having you is hardest when . . .
 - * I am most lonely when . . .
 - * Sometimes I feel angry . . .
 - * When I'm angry, I usually . . .
 - * I am worrying about . . .

- * One of my fears is . . .
- * A special memory is . . .
- * I wish . . .
- * I hope . . .
- * I regret that . . .
- * It's a daily struggle for me to . . .
- * Today I noticed that . . .
- * You would have enjoyed . . .
- * You left me with . . .
- * Your greatest gift to me is . . .

These are suggestions to help you get started. You will have many more of your own once you begin. I hope you will put "buy myself a notebook" on your list for today.

*Pour your heart down on paper,
and look at it and deal with it.
(Dale Evans)*

*In the months after my daughter's death, I filled four notebooks
with entries – writing sometimes daily, sometimes several times a day,
sometimes only once in several days. I described feelings,
the events of the day, occasions of recall, of sorrow and hope.
It was a means of moving the grief away,
getting it down somewhere else, siphoning it off.
(Martha Whitmore Hickman)*

HELPING OTHERS TO BE HELPFUL

I often hear people express disappointment and even anger towards friends, family and clergy about how unfeeling and uncaring they seem to be. Sometimes it is about the things they say, such as "I know just how you feel". Perhaps they are afraid to even mention your loved one's name. Or maybe they said they would be "here for you", but haven't called since the funeral.

It could even be that you realize that you have said and done those same things. It may seem that they don't care, but more likely it's that they don't know how to help. They may not understand grief. They may be afraid of adding to your pain. It may be helpful for you to consider ways to teach them how to help someone who has experienced the death of a loved one. It may seem easier to grit your teeth and carry on, but exploring those hurts can strengthen a relationship, and you will both benefit.

Here are some examples of ways you can communicate your needs:

A good friend tells you that she doesn't know what to say. I would tell her:

“There aren’t any words that can take away the pain I’m feeling. Your willingness to be with me is a wonderful gift. If you will just listen to me. I know I don’t even make sense sometimes, but your hug and your tears help me feel less alone.”

Your spouse’s favorite nephew avoids saying her name. I might say:

“I know you are trying not to remind me of my loss, but I need to hear her name and be able to talk about her. She was such an important part of my life. I don’t want to erase those memories.”

Nearly everyone you know offers cliches like: “I know just how you feel” or “You’re strong – you’ll get through this.” I would say:

“No, you really can’t know how I’m feeling, but I appreciate your sympathy. I hope you will stick with me as I struggle through this.” “I’m feeling anything but strong, but I appreciate your faith in my ability to get through this. I hope you will be available for support.”

If your clergy doesn’t call after the funeral and you would like to talk through your feelings or are questioning your faith, it would be better to *call them and request a visit* than to add anger about the neglect to your emotional laundry basket. Sometimes clergy are as awkward about grief as regular folks.

Your longtime friend says, “Let’s get together sometime.” I might say:

“When would be a good time for you? I’m not very good company, but the weekends are very long.”

If an invitation is extended and you really aren’t feeling up to it, I might say:

“Thank you for asking. I’m not up to it this time, but please call me again. I really do need your support.”

I’m sure you have experienced other scenarios, and these aren’t standardized answers. I use the examples to help you start thinking about how you can respond and engage the support of the people around you who really do want to help you through this difficult time.

WHY WOULD I WANT TO JOIN A SUPPORT GROUP

Grief crosses all boundaries. Among people who are suffering the loss of a loved one, barriers come down. People we didn't know before are no longer strangers. To be among others who are sharing a similar loss...to learn from them the ways in which their lives could be made less troublesome or painful...is a great gift. Other survivors who have gone before us have tremendous knowledge, support and comfort to share, and we will benefit by being open and receptive to them.

Reluctance to commit to a support group is understandable. Chances are, if we attend a few times, we will begin making connections and establishing friendships. We will feel great relief among those who know the road we are on, the rugged terrain over which we will travel, and what is required to make the journey.

Excerpts from "A Time to Grieve"
By Carol Staudacher

To know the road ahead, ask those who are coming back
(Chinese Proverb)

Other Resources You Might Find Helpful:

I Remember, I Remember by Enid Traisman. A book to help with journaling with space for photos, letters, and stories. Can be saved as a memory book for family.

Fire in My Heart: Ice in My Veins by Enid Traisman. This is a grief journal and a tremendous help for teens.

Good Grief by Granger Westberg. This book has become a classic for caring. It is simple and direct and small enough to carry in a pocket or purse and read at odd moments or in one sitting.

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