

BEREAVEMENT NEWSLETTER

COMMUNICATION

Putting your feelings into words – **communication** -- is a key to coping and growing through grief. Research has shown that having at least one other person to talk with is one of the healthiest things you can do for yourself. Think about a family member, a friend or a co-worker with whom you can share your thoughts and feelings. This could also be a professional person such as a counselor, a minister or physician. Grief support groups are also helpful for many people. Hospice of Siouxland offers support groups, called Grief and Growth, which meet several times a year. If you live in our service area, you will receive an invitation to attend one of these groups.

If you need a listener when you feel like getting things off your chest, you may have to search for someone. If you wait for friends to volunteer to listen, you may be waiting a long time. Some people find that it is easy to talk to someone they know well. Others find it easier to talk with someone they have just met. **Remember – the more you talk about a painful subject, the less power it has over you.**

UNWANTED ADVICE You may find that as you communicate your grief to another person, you will receive tidbits of advice. Well-meaning friends or family members often try to help with statements such as: “You need to be strong!” “Just keep busy!” “Cheer up. It could be worse!” “Your loved one is at peace, so be thankful for that!” or “It’s time to get on with your life!” If you hear these or similar messages, you will do yourself a favor to ignore them.

When you receive unwanted advice, remind yourself that everyone grieves differently, and there are no “shoulds” or “musts” in grief. Assert your personal right to grieve as you choose. The only person you have to please in this grief process is yourself.

COMMUNICATING YOUR NEEDS People who care about you truly want to help you through your grief. They cannot take away your pain, but they can help in many ways. However, they do not instinctively know your needs and may feel awkward stepping forward with suggestions. Don’t be afraid to make your needs known. If going to worship services alone is difficult, ask someone to attend with you. If Saturday nights are especially hard for eating alone, invite someone to go out for dinner or to come to your house. Decide what would be helpful for you, and then act to make it happen.

Allowing others to do things for you and with you is not a sign of weakness but of strength. So give people an opportunity to show that they care. Make time for people you enjoy and spend time with them.

THOSE WHO FALL AWAY. What happens when people on whom you are depending won't allow you to talk about what's on your mind or in your heart? Some friends may avoid you altogether. Some people are so uncomfortable with grief that they neglect those who need them most. On the other hand, many bereaved experience love and support from people from whom they least expect it. Cherish those who are there for you, and try to forgive the others.

THE CRAZIES. Many grievors say, "I think I'm going crazy!" or "I must be losing my mind!" Can you identify with any of the following problems?

- You forget things.
- You can't concentrate.
- You drive through a red light or stop sign.
- You lose things.
- You're overwhelmed by simple chores.
- You act in unusual ways or think unusual thoughts.

Don't be alarmed by these behaviors. Grief temporarily robs your brain of the ability to think clearly or to concentrate. This is a crazy time in your life, a time which doesn't make sense. You can expect to do and think some unusual things as you move through the chaos of your grief. This happens to most grievors, and you really aren't crazy.

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

By Terry Kettering

There's an elephant in the room.
It is large and squatting, so it is
Hard to get around it.
Yet we squeeze by with, "How are you?"
And a thousand other forms of trivial
chatter.
We talk about the weather.
We talk about work.
We talk about everything else—
except the elephant in the room.

Oh, please, let's talk about the elephant
in the room.
For if we talk about her death,
Perhaps we can talk about her life?
Can I say "Barbara" to you and not have
You look away?
For if I cannot, then you are leaving me
Alone . . .
In a room . . .
With an elephant.

There's an elephant in the room.
We all know it is there.
We are thinking about the elephant
As we talk together
It is constantly on our minds.

For, you see, it is a very big elephant.
It has hurt us all.
But we do not talk about the elephant
In the room.
Oh, please say her name.
Oh, please, say "Barbara" again.

Staying Spiritually Connected

Will you teach me how to pray? Will you help me to pray again? Prayer is pointless.

These seem like very different statements, but the common thread woven through all of them is the spiritual ruggedness that accompanies our journey through grief.

Grief is hard work. We are dealing with the rude awakening that the world isn't the same anymore. We have lost so much. For many of us, it feels that we have lost God or our beliefs and values, too.

Will you teach me how to pray? This really means, "Help me with my search." It is feeling that someone or something isn't right with us in our sorrow, and we are trying to find or protect the spiritual connection that runs deep within us.

Will you help me to pray again? Is the plea that cries out that God or our beliefs once meant something to us but now seem distant. It happens. It doesn't make us bad people, just honest ones. We prayed for our loved ones and things didn't work out the way we thought was best. Without the answers we hope for, we come to believe that either prayer is meaningless or our relationship with God is.

These questions beg teaching about prayer. We easily get misled by those who want to "fix" us by offering a lecture about how and why to pray. The deeper question is one of relationship. Just as death has shaken a relationship with a person, it often feels like our spiritual relationship has been shaken or disconnected.

This disconnectedness is a significant loss, and often we feel very alone and misdirected as we try to find our way. It can become another package of losses that we just don't need. It also can become a time to grow into a new spiritual depth and awareness. Some suggestions:

Be honest. Face honestly what you are feeling. Sometimes we feel frightened or ashamed by tough questions and confusing experiences. Any spirituality that is healthy loves and affirms **you**, and that includes feelings and questions that may seem anti-God or anti-beliefs. They are just part of your feelings.

Seek a spiritual friend. Sometimes we don't know someone who is willing to hear our deep feelings, tough arguments or pointed accusations. Afraid of losing a friend or embarrassing ourselves, we may hide in our spiritual disconnectedness. Reach out. If you do not feel comfortable with your own minister or congregation, call your local hospice. There are people who will listen.

Give it time. Time is a "best friend" of the bereaved. Take ALL the time you need. Spirituality is a lifetime journey. Even if your questions seem tough, stay with them. They are pathways to a deeper spirituality and to remembering your loved one.

Pray. Prayer is about conversation and relationship. We may not have fancy words or polished theological phrases. We have only the words of our heart, our beliefs, and the love we

have invested in God and in the person we strive to remember. Those are the words of prayer and they are the connection we seek.

*Excerpts from an article in "Journeys"
By Rev. Fr. Richard Gilbert*

*Sometimes you need to hang on to someone else's hope, someone else's faith, someone else's peace and sanity – while yours is under siege. Do it. Courage, hope, faith, sanity, peace . . . they all come and go. Borrow them from someone else's supply until your own comes back in.
(Linus Mundy)*

Other Resources You Might Find Helpful:

The Journey Through Grief – Reflections On Healing by Alan Wolfelt. This book contains brief, spiritual passages that will help grievers through their own unique thoughts and feelings.

A Guide for the Bereaved Survivor: A List of Reactions, Suggestions and Steps for Coping With Grief by Robert Baugher and Marc Calija. practical information on coping, emotional and physical reactions, how others react, dreams, beliefs and long-term features of grief are discussed.

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