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Presented by



WinterSpring Center

Transforming Grief and Loss

*“Courage is not the absence of fear,
but the willingness to proceed
in its presence.”*

NORMAL GRIEF

Grief is a normal response to loss, and may become manifest in feelings, physical sensations, cognition, and or behaviors. Psychological, sociocultural, and physical factors influence the grief reaction.

Harper Neeld (2003) describes 'What is Normal?'

IMPACT

- **Presence of strong emotion, deep sobbing, crying.**
- **Absence of emotion and feeling, numbness.**
- **Need to roam; inability to sit still.**
- **Inability to concentrate or focus.**
- **Yearning and longing for the deceased.**
- **Dominated by memories of the loved one.**
- **Body rhythms disturbed, sleeplessness, early morning waking.**
- **Feeling numb.**
- **Plagued by anger, guilt, and blame. (The "what if's")**
- **Experiencing fear, confusion, and disorientation.**
- **Having no hope, a sense of desolation.**

The choice is to experience and express the grief, again and again. Telling our story ,sharing our fears and sense of dread for the future. As we move through the grief we encounter the dark. It seems to be a long winter.

STUMBLING IN THE DARK

- **Daily life feeling disorganized and in disarray**
- **Loss of our dreams. How our future would be.**
- **Feelings of emptiness, helplessness and hopelessness.**
- **Sadness, depression, despondency and despair.**
- **Decline in health; increase in accidents.**
- **Questioning of long held beliefs and philosophies.**
- **Feeling suspended in mid-air, no foundation.**
- **Continued obsession with anger, blame and guilt.**
- **Unable to find structure or shape for our lives.**
- **Loneliness**

This requires endurance, it is part of the task required to go through the grief or as Dr. William Worden (1991) describes 'Accepting the reality: this has happened' and secondly 'Dealing with raw emotion, the grief process itself'.

All the internal feelings are our grief. The pain in the chest and hollowness in the gut! We have to move that outwardly, releasing it through mourning. Mourning is the outward expression of our grief. There are so many ways to do this. Crying, sobbing, journaling, sharing our story with a friend, in a support group. Visiting the grave, or planting a tree. Looking at photos. Honoring their memory.

"Everybody grieves when someone they love dies. But only people who mourn really heal and move on to live and fully love again....It's powerful and it's the only thing that works." Dr. Alan Wolfelt.

Loss is painful; Bowlby (2000) describes how we will attempt to defend ourselves against this pain and to protect ourselves from it. However if we do not re-engage with the process we may experience “pathological grieving”. Getting stuck in an identity as a griever or of having the defensive behaviors become a destructive way of life for the future. Some of those behaviors can manifest in the following reactions.

Defensive reactions

- **Chronic or recurring illness.**
- **Having accidents.**
- **Losing self in work, caring for others, frenetic activity.**
- **Copying mannerisms, behavior, or even physical condition of the person.**
- **Engaging in destructive behaviors; drinking, drug abuse.**
- **Engulfing self in anger, guilt, and blame.**
- **Becoming depressed and making little effort to get help.**
- **Flying high with euphoria.**
- **Making rash decisions (moving, leaving a job).**

As hard as the path may seem, if we can engage in our grief process and mourn we can move through, not getting stuck in the dark, in winter, but moving toward the light of spring.

‘Deep Sobs- that start beneath my heart and hold my body in a grip that hurts. The lump that swells inside my throat brings pain that tries to choke. Then tears course down my cheeks – I drop my head in my empty hands abandoning myself to deep dark grief and know that with the passing time will come relief. That though the pain may stay, there soon will come a day. When I can say her name and be at peace.’

Norah Leney

LOVE DOES NOT END WITH DEATH

If we can engage in the process, feel our feelings look at our fears and be kind to ourselves we can move through this time. As the sadness and pain lift from the heart we can begin to feel, remember our loved one and look at our love with fondness and light. This takes time, time that needs to be spent in mourning.

Christine Hunter-Robertson

The Ten Essential Touchstones:

1. Open to the presence of your loss.
2. Dispel misconceptions about grief.
3. Embrace the uniqueness of your grief.
4. Explore what you might experience.
5. Recognize you are not crazy.
6. Understand the six needs of mourning.
7. Nurture yourself.
8. Reach out for help.
9. Seek reconciliation, not resolution.
10. Appreciate your transformation.

Written by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Touchstone One: Open to the Presence of Your Loss

By Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Editor's note: Think of your grief as a wilderness—a vast, mountainous, Inhospitable forest. You are in the midst of unfamiliar and often brutal surroundings. You are cold and tired. Yet you must journey through this wilderness. To find your way out, you must become acquainted with its terrain and learn to follow the sometimes hard-to-find trail that leads to healing. In the wilderness of your grief, the touchstones are your trail markers. They are the signs that let you know you are on the right path.

The following is an excerpt from Touchstone One in the new Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart, written by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

“In every heart there is an inner room, where we can hold our greatest treasures and our deepest pain.”
Marianne Williamson

Someone you love has died. In your heart, you have come to know your deepest pain. From my own experiences with loss as well as those of thousands of grieving people I have companioned over the years, I have learned that we cannot go around the pain that is the wilderness of our grief. Instead, we must journey all through it, sometimes shuffling along the less strenuous side paths, sometimes plowing directly into the black center.

In opening to the presence of the pain of your loss, in acknowledging the inevitability of the pain, in being willing to gently embrace the pain, you in effect honor the pain. “What?” you naturally protest, “honor the pain?” Crazy as it may sound, your pain is the key that opens your heart and ushers you on your way to healing.

In many ways, and as strange as it may seem, this book is intended to help you honor your pain. Honoring means recognizing the value of and respecting. It is not instinctive to see grief and the need to openly mourn as something to honor; yet the capacity to love requires the necessity to mourn. To honor your grief is not self-destructive or harmful; it is self-sustaining and life-giving!

You have probably been taught that pain is an indication that something is wrong and that you should find ways to alleviate the pain. In our culture, pain and feelings of loss are experiences most people try to avoid. Why? Because the role of pain and suffering is misunderstood. Normal Thoughts and feelings after a loss are often seen as unnecessary and inappropriate.

You will learn over time that the pain of your grief will keep trying to get your attention until you have the courage to gently, and in small doses, open to its presence. The alternative—denying or suppressing your pain—is in fact more painful. I have learned that the pain that surrounds the *closed* heart of grief is the pain of living against yourself, the pain of denying how the loss changes you, the pain of feeling alone and isolated—unable to openly mourn, unable to love and be loved by those around you.

Instead of becoming dead while you are alive, you can choose to allow yourself to remain open to the pain, which, in large part, honors the love you feel for the person who has died. As an ancient Hebrew sage observed, “If you want life, you must expect suffering.” Paradoxically, it is gathering the courage to move toward the pain that ultimately leads to the healing of your wounded heart. Your integrity is engaged by your feelings and the commitment you make to honor the truth in them.

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Setting Your Intention to Heal

You are on a journey that is naturally frightening, painful, and often lonely. No words, written or spoken, can take away the pain you feel now.

It takes a true commitment to heal in your grief. Yes, you are changed, but with commitment and intention you can and will become whole again. Commitment goes hand in hand with the concept of “setting your intention.” Intention is defined as being conscious of what you want to experience. A close cousin to “affirmation,” it is using the power of positive thought to produce a desired result.

We often use the power of intention in our everyday lives. If you have an important presentation at work, you might focus your thoughts in the days before the presentation on speaking clearly and confidently. You might envision yourself being well-received by your colleagues. You have set your intention to succeed in this presentation. By contrast, if you focus on the many ways your presentation can fail, and you succumb to your anxiety, you are much less likely to give a good presentation.

How can you use this in your journey through grief? By setting your intention to heal.

When you set your intention to heal, you make a true commitment to positively influence the course of your journey. You choose between being what I call a “passive witness” or an “active participant” in your grief. I’m sure you have heard this tired cliché: Time heals all wounds. Yet, time alone has nothing to do with healing. To heal, you must be willing to learn about the mystery of the grief journey. It can’t be fixed or “resolved,” it can only be soothed and “reconciled” through actively experiencing the multitude of thoughts and feelings involved.

The concept of intention-setting presupposes that your outer reality is a direct reflection of your inner thoughts and beliefs. If you can change or mold some of your thoughts and beliefs, then you can influence your reality. And in journaling and speaking (and praying!) your intentions, you help “set” them.

You might tell yourself, “I can and will reach out for support in my grief. I will become filled with hope that I can and will survive this loss.” Together with these words, you might form mental pictures of hugging and talking to your friends and seeing your happier self in the future.

Setting your intent to heal is not only a way of surviving your loss (although it is indeed that!), it is a way of guiding your grief to the best possible outcome. Of course, you will still have to honor and embrace your pain during this time. By honoring the presence of your pain, by understanding the appropriateness of your pain, you are committing to facing the pain. You are committing yourself to paying attention to your anguish in ways that allow you to begin to breathe life into your soul again. That, my friend, is a very good reason to give attention to your intention. The alternative would be to shut down in an effort to avoid and deny your pain, which to die while you are still alive.

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Making Grief Your Friend

You cannot heal without mourning or expressing your grief outwardly. Denying your grief, running from it, or minimizing it, only seems to make it more confusing and overwhelming. To lessen your hurt, you must embrace it. As strange as it may seem, you must make it your friend.

When I reflect on making grief my friend, I think about my father. Sometimes when I fully acknowledge that I'll never see my father physically on this earth again, I am engulfed by an overwhelming sadness. Then I, with intention, try to give attention to what comes next. Yes, I feel his absence, but I also feel his presence. I realize that while my father has been dead for over three years, my love and admiration for him have continued to grow. With every day that passes, the love I have for my father grows larger, undeterred by the loss of his physical presence. My intention has been, and continues to be, to honor his presence, while acknowledging his absence. The beauty of this is that while I mourn, I can continue to love.

This article is an excerpt from the following book

Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart

One of North America's most loved grief educators, Dr. Alan Wolfelt has written many books about healing in grief. This new book is his most comprehensive, covering the most important lessons that mourners have taught him in his two decades of working with the bereaved.

Because grief can be so painful, and seem overwhelming, it frightens us. Many people worry if they are grieving in the 'right' way, and wonder if the feelings they have are normal.

**MOST PEOPLE WHO SUFFER A LOSS EXPERIENCE
ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING:**

- Feel tightness in the throat or heaviness in the chest
- Have an empty feeling in their stomach and lose their appetite
- Feel guilty at times, and angry at others
- Feel restless and look for activity but find it difficult to concentrate
- Feel as though the loss isn't real, that it didn't actually happen
- Sense the loved one's presence, like finding themselves expecting the person to walk in the door at the usual time, hearing their voice, or seeing their face
- Wander aimlessly and forget and don't finish things they've started to do around the house
- Have difficulty sleeping, and dream of their loved one frequently
- Assume mannerisms or traits of their loved one
- Experience an intense preoccupation with the life of the deceased
- Feel guilty or angry over things that happened or didn't happen in the relationship with the deceased
- Feel intensely angry at the loved one for leaving them
- Feel as though they need to take care of other people who seem uncomfortable around them, by politely not talking about the feelings of loss
- Need to tell and retell and remember things about the loved one and the experience of their death
- Feel their mood changes over the slightest things
- Cry at unexpected times

These are all natural and normal grief responses. It's important to cry and talk with people when you need to. If you're concerned or worried about your reaction, or need someone to talk to, call:

WinterSpring
Phone: 552-0620

HELPING OTHERS TO HELP YOU

It seems very difficult for others to learn how to show they care for you. The person who cares often expresses that caring in ways that do not show the real deep-down feeling. Awkward attempts to offer support are well meant but often shockingly naïve.

From the reports of hundreds of widows I have talked to, I've put together some of the cliches that I feel most disturb you as a widow and your silent response to each.

"Time will heal." (I can't wait. It hurts now.)

"You're too young to be a widow." (I know, but it's not my fault.)

"You're young; you'll marry again." (I can't fathom that right now.)

"Call me for lunch during the week." (It's evenings and weekends that are so lonely.)

"Call me and we'll get together." (I feel too vulnerable to call and possibly be rejected.)

"You're lucky you have children." (Oh, yeah?)

*"Well, at least you had twenty good years with him. You should be grateful."
(I'm grateful, but I'm still lonely.)*

"I understand exactly how you feel." (Oh no, you don't.)

If you have friends or relatives who are awkward with you, realize that they are having problems with your grief. If you can, tell them to do the following:

1. Call often. Tell them that you need their calls more after the first couple of months. Tell them not to expect you to call them, since your energy level may be too low for you to make the effort even though you may need to talk.
2. Offer a specific date to do something with you. Ask them to try to think of your "down" times – evenings and weekends particularly.
3. Feel free to talk with you about your husband. Don't avoid his name. It helps you to deal with reality if you can share memories of your husband with friends or relatives.
4. Realize that although you may seem to be "doing so well," you have a lot of grief to work through.
5. Avoid pitying you. Tell them to imagine being pitied. Ask them to put themselves in the position, for a moment, of having others view them as incomplete. Ask them to care about you but not to pity you.
6. Treat you as a human being, as a real person, not like a china doll or someone without brains.
7. Express their caring. If they feel like crying when talking to you, it's okay. Let them know that crying together is better than avoiding the pain.

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8. Say nothing rather than naïve cliches. They should know that a hug or a squeeze of the hand means more than a hundred ill-chosen words. Tell your friends this.
9. Bring food or invite you to dinner. As one woman said, "I have to eat, but it's hard to cook."
10. Go for walks with you. Walking is good for depression and will allow you to "walk off" feelings.

Most of us feel awkward around pain or suffering. That, too, is normal. If you are fortunate enough to share moments of pain with your relatives and friends, you will eventually share moments of joy with them as you emerge from your grief.

Taken from an article by the same title found in
SURVIVAL HANDBOOK FOR WIDOWS
by Ruth Loweinsohn

SUGGESTIONS FOR HELPING YOURSELF THROUGH GRIEF

This title is not meant to indicate that others in our lives do not help us through grief. We do need the help of relatives and friends, and may need the help of Professional Counseling. At the same time, it is important for us to make the effort to help ourselves. Remember that a lot of energy will be used for healing. Treat yourself with the same care and affection that you would offer to a good friend in the same situation. Most of us are aware of “LOVE THY NEIGHBOR” – we forget the part – “AS YOU LOVE YOURSELF”. Not all suggestions will be helpful to everyone. Grief has its unique side. Choose the ideas that appeal to you.

1. Go gently. Don't rush too much. Your body needs energy for repair.
2. Don't take on new responsibilities right away. Don't over-extend yourself. Keep decision making to a minimum.
3. Accept help and support when offered.
4. Ask for help. Our family and friends can't read our minds. It is very important to find someone who cares, understands, and with whom you may talk freely. It's okay to need comforting.
5. Seek the support of others...invite a relative/friend for dinner or overnight. Also consider meeting new people.
6. Be patient with yourself. Healing takes time.
7. Lean into the pain. It cannot be outrun. Let the grief/healing process run its full course.
8. Through this emotional period, it is okay to feel depressed. Crying does make you feel better.
9. If Sundays, holidays, etc. are especially difficult times, schedule activities that you find particularly comforting into these time periods.
10. Seek the help of a counselor or clergy if grief is unresolved.
11. Try to get adequate rest. Go to bed earlier. Avoid caffeine in coffee, tea and colas.
12. Good nutrition is important to help the healing process. (Decrease junk food and try to eat a balanced meal.)
13. Keep a journal. It is a good way to understand what you are feeling/thinking. Hopefully when you re-read it later you will see that you are getting better.
14. READ. There are many helpful books on grief. If grief is understood, it is a little easier to handle.
15. Moderate exercise helps (walking, tennis, swimming, etc.). It offers an opportunity to work off frustration and may aid sleep.
16. Begin towards building a pleasant time with family and friends. Don't feel guilty if you have a good time. Your loved one would want you to be happy.
17. It is okay to be angry. You may be angry at yourself, God, the person who died, others, or just feel angry in general. Don't push it down. Let it out (hit a pillow, scream, swim, exercise, hit a punching bag, etc.).

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18. Do not have unrealistic expectations of yourself. Grief takes **TIME**. It comes and goes.
19. Do things a little differently, yet try not to make a lot of changes. This sounds like a contradiction, but it is not.
20. Plan new interests — join a tennis group; read a novel/mystery: take a class (crafts, skills, self-awareness); learn and do something new. Rediscover old interests, activities and friends.
21. Plan things to which you can look forward – a trip, visit, lunch with a special friend. Start now to build memories today for tomorrow.
22. Find quotes/posters that are helpful to you and post them where you can see them.
23. **PRAY** to the person who has died.
24. Other ideas; take a hot, relaxing bath; bask in the sun; take time for yourself (movie, theatre, dinner). Be good to yourself.
25. Be determined to work through your grief.
26. **DO SOMETHING FOR SOMEONE ELSE**. Join either a Volunteer or Support group. Helping others, i.e. phoning, attending meetings, typing, mailing, etc. does much to ease the pain.

REACH OUT AND TOUCH SOMEONE!

27. Remember, **YOU WILL GET BETTER**. Hold on to **HOPE**. Some days you just seem to exist, but better days will be back. You will develop a renewed sense of purpose gradually.
28. Simply stated – put balance in your life. **PRAY, REST, WORK, READ and RECREATION**.

What We Need During Grief

Time -- time alone; and time with others whom you trust and who will listen when you need to talk. Months and years of time to feel and understand the feelings that go along with loss.

Rest -- relaxation -- exercise -- nourishment -- diversion -- you may need extra amounts of things you needed before. Hot baths, afternoon naps, a trip, a cause to work for -- any of these may give you a lift. Grief is an exhausting process emotionally. You need to replenish yourself. Follow what feels healing to you and what connects you to the people and things you love.

Security -- try to reduce or find help for financial or other stresses in your life. Allow yourself to be close to those you trust. Getting back into routine helps. You may need to allow yourself to do things at your own pace.

Hope -- you may find hope and comfort from those who have experienced a similar loss. Knowing some things that helped them, and realizing that they have recovered and time *does* help, may give you hope that sometime in the future your grief will be less raw and painful. Joining a grief support group may be helpful.

Caring -- you need acceptance and caring throughout. Try to allow yourself to accept the expressions of caring from others even though they may be uneasy and awkward. If you lack support, make finding it your first goal. Helping a friend or close relative also suffering the same loss may bring a feeling of closeness with that person.

Goals -- for awhile, it will seem that much of life is without meaning. At times like these, small goals are helpful. Something to look forward to, like playing tennis with a friend next week, a movie tomorrow night, a trip next month, helps you get through the time in the immediate future. Living one day at a time is a rule of thumb. At first, don't be surprised if your enjoyment of these things isn't the same. This is normal. As time passes you may need to work on some longer range goals to give some structure and direction to your life. Involve yourself in a meaningful activity. You may need guidance and counseling to help with this.

Small pleasures -- do not underestimate the healing effects of small pleasures as you are ready. Sunsets, a walk in the woods, a favorite food -- all are small steps toward regaining your pleasures in life itself. Don't be afraid to have fun -- laughter is good medicine.

Permission to backslide -- sometimes after a period of feeling good, we find ourselves back in the old feelings of extreme sadness, despair, or anger. This is often the nature of grief, up and down, and it may happen over and over for a time. It happens because as humans, we cannot take in all of the pain and the meaning of death at once. So, we let it in a little at a time.

Self acceptance -- accept and express your feelings as they will help you learn about yourself and the grief process you are experiencing. Grief can be exhausting, so pace yourself accordingly. Drugs may not be helpful. Even medication used to help people get through periods of shock under a physician's guidance may prolong and delay the necessary process of grieving. We cannot prevent or cure grief. The only way out is through.

Reference: Tatelbaum, Judy. The Courage to Grieve, New York, Lippincott and Crowell, Pub. 1980

Notes from “**HOW TO SURVIVE THE LOSS OF A LOVE**”

By: M. Colgrove, H. Bloomfield and P. McWilliams

Recognize the loss.

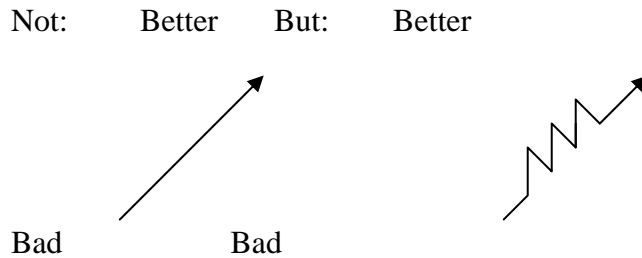
Be with the pain (don't avoid it)!

You are not alone (loss is part of life).

You will survive.

Give yourself time to heal.

Healing has its ups and downs:



Get lots of rest (rest is the guardian of health).

Stick to your schedule (to maintain a sense of order).

Keep decision-making to a minimum.

It's OK to need comforting (be brave enough to accept the help of others).

Surround yourself with things that are alive (don't isolate yourself from life).

Do your mourning now.

Be gentle with yourself.

Mementos (use, if helpful...if not, get rid of).

Anticipate a positive outcome.

It's OK to feel depressed (crying can be a good release).

It's OK to be angry.

Remember you're vulnerable.

Pamper yourself.

Remaining distraught is no proof of love (love is life-supporting).

Keep a journal (putting your thoughts on paper is a good way of getting them out and sorting through them).

There's a beauty in sadness (sadness, not self-pity).

Heal at your own pace.

Forgive the other person.

Forgive yourself.

You are a better person for having loved.

Prepare to make adjustments (a new chapter in our life is beginning).

Praise yourself for your courage to relate.

Be open and start anew.

The past will come up (expect this and be with that feeling, knowing it will pass).

Growth (from weathering a crisis).

Above are some of the chapter headings from the book.

Comfort Quickies: Self Care While Grieving

Chris Rothman, Ph.D.

During grieving, it is common to need breaks from our emotions. This in no way dishonors the seriousness of our concerns and the memories of our loved one. These ideas may give you some added nourishment to respond to the stress that comes with grieving.

- Lie in the sun streaming in through your windows. Bathe, breathe in the sun.
- Designate an afternoon or evening and take the phone off the hook.
- When you are worried or obsessing, set up a specific time of the day to "worry" for 20 minutes. Set a timer. When time is up, do something rewarding for your self.
- Do something you're good at. It is important to ground yourself in your skills and abilities, even if the outcome isn't up to par (trouble concentrating and decreased zest are common in grief).
- Comfort yourself by taking a warm bath using your favorite scents, and burn aroma therapy candles—it's invigorating and relaxing at the same time.
- Buy yourself or your loved one a gift—and have the clerk gift wrap it. Choose the prettiest paper and bow. Celebrate fond memories.
- Wrap up in a warm blanket. Put on relaxation tapes and sip on your favorite tea or hot chocolate!
- Dressed in comfortable clothing, find a rocking chair and "rock your troubles away."
- Play music that matches your mood. Feel understood by the songs and singers that share your experiences.
- Especially when you are feeling stressed and overwhelmed, forget about making "to do" lists, and at the close of each day, make your list of "what's been done." No wonder you're tired!
- Burn Russian amber or sandalwood incense.
- Find something alive to care for: plants, pets, fish, etc.
- Eat at least one nourishing meal each day, even if the food doesn't hit your taste buds like you're used to.

THE FIVE THINGS

Dr. Ira Byrock (1997), a pioneer in the American hospice movement describes the five things or topics that need to be covered in order to help us transform our grief.. These five things cover the emotional territory of any relationship and may be discussed over days and months during its natural course.

“Becoming mindful of this transformative capacity of grief is one of the most meaningful and powerful ways to understand your loss.” S. M. Kumar PH.D (2005) ‘Grieving Mindfully’

These five things can be integrated into our healing journey

1. ***I’m sorry.*** There are always a few regrets in a close relationship. All sincere apologies pave the way for forgiveness. *“I’m sorry I said the things I did when I was angry with your illness.”*
2. ***I forgive you.*** This can be forgiveness about anything and everything. Forgiveness can be thought of as radical acceptance toward someone else. Forgiveness is not to be confused with forgetting. When we forgive through the power of compassion, you release the hold that the issues have had on your life. Rather than feeling unresolved outrage or a sense of justice unserved, the person takes upon themselves the responsibility for living life on their terms.
3. ***I love you.*** Love is why we grieve. Love transcends all sorrow, but sorrow can be fueled by love. Asking forgiveness and forgiving wrongs opens the heart to the full power of love. Acknowledging this love is an affirmation of the relationship, our grief, and our capacity to share ourselves with another human being.
4. ***Thank you.*** What did the person learn from this relationship? What was special about the relationship and their time together? How did their life change as a result of the loved one’s presence, or even loss? Perhaps the person learned to love deeper than they had thought possible, or they found freedom in the relationship they never experienced before. What was gained, this is what we can be thankful for.
5. ***Good-bye.*** There is hardly ever a right time to say good-bye. Saying good-bye after the loved one has died is recognition of their absence that the death has occurred. When saying good-bye we are not dismissing them from our lives, it does not mean that the grief is over. Grief does not end, even though it may stop hurting, grief only changes.

With these five things comes acceptance which facilitates the reconstruction of meaning. When we seek meaning from an understanding of what we are experiencing, we actively reconstruct our world to accommodate the changes that have been experienced and that we continue to go through. The empowerment that comes from realizing just how active a role we have to play in the construction of our world is the vehicle for harnessing the transformative power of grief.

Adapted for WinterSpring by Christine Hunter-Robertson

EXCERPT FROM A GRIEF OBSERVED BY C. S. LEWIS

No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing.

At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what everyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they would talk to one another and not me.

There are moments, most unexpectedly, when something inside me tries to assure me that I don't really mind so much, not so very much, after all. Love is not the whole of a man's life. I was happy before I ever met H. I've plenty of what are called "resources." One is ashamed to listen to this voice but it seems for a little to be making out a good case. Then comes a sudden jab of red-hot memory and all this "commonsense" vanishes like an ant in the mouth of a furnace.

On the rebound one passes into tears and pathos. Maudlin tears, I almost prefer the moment of agony. These are at least clean and honest. But the bath of self-pity, the wallow, the loathsome sticky-sweet pleasure of indulging it—that disgusts me. And even while I'm doing it, I know it leads me to misrepresent H. herself. Give that mood its head and in a few minutes I shall have substituted for the real woman a mere doll to be blubbered over. Thank God the memory of her is still too strong (will it always be too strong?) to let me get away with it.

And no one ever told me about the laziness of grief. Except at my job—where the machine seems to run on writing but even reading a letter is too much. Even shaving. What does it matter now whether my cheek is rough or smooth? They say an unhappy man wants distractions—something to take him out of himself. Only as a dog-tired man wants an extra blanket on a cold night; he'd rather lie there shivering than get up and find one. It's easy to see why the lonely become untidy; finally, dirty and disgusting.

...An odd by-product of my loss is that I'm aware of being an embarrassment to everyone I meet. At work, at the club, in the street, I see people, as they approach me, trying to make up their minds whether they'll "say something about it" or not. I hate it if they do, and if they don't. Some funk it altogether. R. has been avoiding me for a week. I like best the well-brought-up young men, almost boys, who walk up to me as if I were a dentist, turn very red, get it over, and then edge away to the bar as quickly as they decently can. Perhaps the bereaved ought to be isolated in special settlements like lepers.

IDEAS FOR JOURNAL WRITING

You may find it helpful to clarify your thoughts about your loved one by recording your feelings in the form of a letter. Write a letter to the person who died, expressing your thoughts and feelings about the following issues:

A special memory that I have about you...

What I miss the most about you and our relationship...

What I wish I'd said or hadn't said...

What I'd like to ask you...

What I wish we'd done or hadn't done...

What I've had the hardest time dealing with...

Ways in which you will continue to live on in me...

Special ways I have for keeping my memories of you alive...

Chose one or several ideas that have significance for you or start at the top of the list and work your way down. These topics may serve to help you come up with your own ideas specific to your situation and relationship

Grief Rituals and Memorialization

Rituals are not the past. They are the reminders that there is a path.

Emmanuel

Part of the sorrow we experience through grief is the physical absence of our loved one. To help us connect with our memories, and get safely back, grief rituals are particularly helpful. Taking the pressure off a little at a time without immersing completely allows a comforting escape from the build up of emotions.

Make something that reminds you of your loved one, for example a drawing of her, a clay sculpture, a needlework project, et cetera. Design something to acknowledge your unique sorrows.

Plant a bush, shrub, tree, or flowers in a special place. This is especially helpful if the burial site is far away and cannot be visited often. Use this spot for your private ceremonies and as a gathering place for other family members. Leave small mementos, flowers, read a favorite poem, release a helium balloon, or speak to the deceased.

Keep mementos displayed if it comforts you. Pack things away that cause you pain. You may find you change your mind and want things you've given away, so don't let others rush in to clean out the closets.

Write down your special memories. Add to these stories or anecdotes from friends and family. Alternatively you could make a tape recording of the same thing. Write a letter to the deceased expressing feelings you may be struggling with. Buy a special journal and set aside time each day to write. Make a memory book including stories and photos.

One Hospital holds "Healing Circles" Weekly for staff to pray for patients as well as for themselves. Sometimes community rituals are designed to unite both families and professionals, such as those honoring cancer victims. Join in the ceremonies of remembrance, and explore other ways to connect with other grievers, such as through a support group.

Find ways to let your loved one live through you. Explore hobbies he enjoyed, and continue to do the things you did together. Cook his favorite meal. Listen to his favorite song. Tell his favorite joke. Visit his favorite places. Make a memorial donation in his name to an appropriate and meaningful cause. Volunteer your time toward his pet project.

Acknowledge birthdays, anniversaries or other landmarks in life by involving your loved one through ceremony. Transform family traditions and allow them to evolve to reflect your new life without your loved one. View old videos, share favorite stories, set a place at the table, and allow laughter and tears to combine into a special time of healing and reflection. Embrace the new relationship that is formed after death, and demonstrate it through remembrance activities.

HELPING CHILDREN THROUGH GRIEF

Grief is an extremely difficult and engaging process. One must focus on him/herself during this period, and rightly so. Many times, however, we overlook the fact that grief comes in all sizes and ages. Therefore, children are often ignored during mourning, with the rationale that “they wouldn’t understand”. The grieving process in children is highly complex, since so much depends upon each child’s stage of development. For instance, a 3-year old’s understanding of death and the mourning process will be quite different from that of a 10 year-old. Both of them would be very different from a 16-year old. Yet, there are many fundamental similarities between a child’s grief and the adult mourning process. It is important to understand that grief work provides vast potentials for growth for all ages. Following are a list of suggestions in helping your child through the grief process.

1. Set time aside to talk with the child – explain the events occurring, why you are crying, etc.
2. Use basic words like “die” and “dead” to convey the message.
3. Use the deceased person’s name when referring to him/her.
4. Avoid the phrases that “soften the blow”; phrases such as “sleeping”, “went on a vacation”, “God took them”, etc. will only confuse and scare a child.
5. Let the child ask questions – answer truthfully! Be honest, simple and direct. If you don’t understand something, let the child know that, too.
6. Be sensitive to the age of the child, and his/her level of understanding – don’t offer information beyond the child’s comprehension, as it will only confuse matters.
7. Tell stories that will increase the child’s awareness.
8. Read or have the child read children’s books related to death (many are available).
9. Play with the child (e.g. dolls, drawing, imagining) in ways that will allow the child to express his/her feelings.
10. Watch for TV programs that might help the child’s understanding.
11. Read books yourself on helping a child through grief – there are many excellent ones.
12. Talk about God with the child – pray with the child.
13. Share your feelings and experience with child if he/she is able to understand them.
14. Let the child participate if he/she wants to: e.g. going to the funeral, visiting the cemetery. However, it is very important that you don’t pressure the child into doing any of these things.

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15. Accept help from others to watch the children and talk with them – but remember, you are the most important person to the child!
16. You are a role model for the child – if you hide your grief, they will learn to hide it too.
17. We should (as much as possible) have an understanding of our own grieving process, since these things are communicated to the child.
18. Let the child vent his/her emotions and acknowledge them.
19. Watch for tell-tale signs of maladjustments, e.g. eating and/or sleeping disturbances over a long period of time.
20. Seek pastoral or family counseling if the grief is unresolved.
21. Watch for earlier mourning experiences of the child. For example, a child often experiences death for the first time when a pet dies.
22. Remember, a child will have the same feelings we have, but a different level of understanding.
23. Communicate to the child your appreciation of having had the deceased person around.
24. Discuss and have the child recognize changes in routine due to the death.
25. Plan something (e.g. a vacation) that you and the child can look forward to.
26. This is perhaps the most important of all – please do not be disappointed or angry if the child does not understand or appreciate the death! They are going through a learning experience and discovery – give them time!

From: **HOPE FOR THE BEREAVED**, Syracuse, N.Y.

HOW TO HELP OURSELVES THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

In our lives, there are many holidays or “special days”, such as birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, weddings and Easter to name a few. These are all difficult days for the bereaved but for many, the most difficult holiday of the year is Christmas. Listed below are some ideas and suggestions that others have found helpful in coping with the Holiday Season. Choose the ones that will help you.

1. Family Get-Togethers may be extremely difficult. Be honest with each other about your feelings. Don't set expectations too high for yourself or for the day. If you wish things to be the same, you are going to be disappointed. Do things a little differently. Undertake only what each family member can handle comfortably.
2. There is no right or wrong way to handle the day. Some may wish to follow family traditions, while others may choose to change.
3. Keep in mind the feelings of your children or family members. Try to make the holiday season as joyous as possible for them.
4. Be careful of “shoulds” – it is better to do what is most helpful for you and your family.
5. Set limitations. Realize that it isn't going to be easy. Do the things that are very special and/or important to you. Do the best you can.
6. Once you have made the decision on the role you and your family will play during the holidays, let relatives and friends know.
7. Baking and cleaning the house can get out of proportion. If these chores are enjoyable, go ahead, but not to the point that it is tiring. Either buy baked foods, or go without this year.
8. If you used to cut down your own tree, consider buying it already cut this year. Let your children, other family members, neighboring teens, friends, or people from your church help with the decorating of the tree and house. If you choose not to have a tree, perhaps you could make a centerpiece from the lower branches of a tree, get a ceramic tree, or a small table top tree.
9. Emotionally, physically and psychologically, it is draining. You need every bit of strength. Try to get enough rest.
10. What you choose to do the first year, you don't have to do the next.
11. One possibility for the first year may be to visit friends, relatives, or even go away on a vacation. Planning, packing, etc., keeps your mind off the holiday and you share the time in a different and hopefully less painful setting.
12. Some people pretend Nov. 25th is Christmas and try to get whatever shopping, card writing, etc., done by that date. This way you can avoid to some degree the carols and wishes from clerks and strangers of a “Merry Christmas”.
13. How do we answer “Happy Holidays”? You may say “I'll try” or “Best Wishes to you”.

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(CONTINUED...HOLIDAYS)

14. If shopping seems to be too much, have your spouse, relative or close friend help you. Consider shopping through a catalog.
15. If you are accustomed to having Christmas dinner at your home, change and go to relatives; or change the time (instead of 2:00 p.m., make it 4:00 p.m.). Some find it helpful to be involved in the activity of preparing a large meal. Serving buffet style and/or eating in a different room may help.
16. Try attending Christmas service at a different time and/or church.
17. Some people fear crying in public, especially at the church service. It is usually better not to push the tears down any time. You should be gentle with yourself and not expect so much of yourself. Worrying about crying is an additional burden. If you let go and cry, you probably will feel better. It should not ruin the day for other family members, but will provide them with the same freedom.
18. Cut back on your card sending. It is not necessary to send cards, especially to those people we will see over the holidays.
19. Do something for someone else, such as volunteer work at Unity Kitchens, or visit the lonely and shut-ins. Ask someone who is alone to share the day with your family. Provide help for a needy family.
20. Donate a gift or money in your loved one's name.
21. Share your concerns, feelings, apprehensions, etc., as the holiday approaches with a relative or friend. Tell them that this is a difficult time for you. Accept their help. You will appreciate their love and support at this time.
22. Holidays often magnify feelings of loss of a loved one. It is important and natural to experience the sadness that comes. To block such feelings is unhealthy. Keep the positive memory of the loved one alive.
23. Often after the first year, the people in your life may expect you to be "over it". We are never "over it", but the experience of many bereaved is that eventually they enjoy the holidays again. Hold on to HOPE.
24. Don't forget: "Anticipation of any holiday is so much worse than the actual holiday".

*Although you and your loved one will be apart
May the spirit of Christmas comfort your heart
And may its message of peace be with you each day
To help and guide you along life's way*

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR THE BEREAVED

Take time to accept death.

Take time to let go.

Take time to make decisions.

Take time to share.

Take time to believe.

Take time to forgive.

Take time to feel good about yourself.

Take time to meet new friends.

Take time to laugh.

Take time to give.

BEREAVEMENT AND STRESS

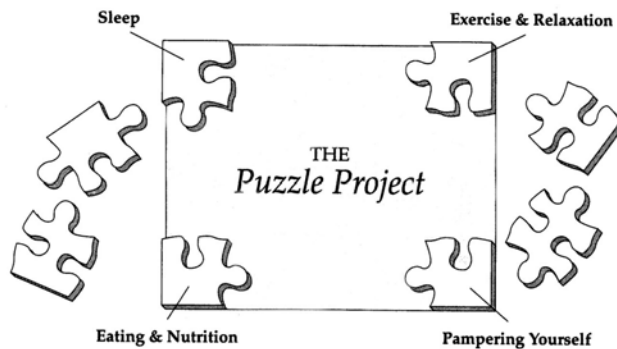
In the time following a death we are subjected to very high levels of stress. It is a time when we are vulnerable to accidents, illness and other physical changes. It is a time to pay attention to physical health as well as learning new ways to manage stress.

The “work” of grief must be carried out by the bereaved person, it can’t be successfully “subcontracted.” It is important then to allow yourself the full gamut of emotions, thoughts and physical sensations ... without judgment or criticism. Talking about these events with someone who can withhold judgment, criticism or advice is an important first step.

Understanding that “life as I have known it” is forever changed, implies that there are a tremendous number of adjustments to be made in day to day living. An analogy can be made to the process of living our lives as if we were assembling a large and complex jigsaw puzzle. A significant loss through death seems to upend our puzzle and we have to begin the assembly process again. And this time, the puzzle may look quite different from the one over which we had previously been laboring.

Managing stress involves working to put the puzzle back together again ... starting with the corners and straight edges! Each corner represents an area of our lives to work toward managing with new strategies and support. The “four corners” of stress management:

- 1) sleep management
- 2) exercise and relaxation
- 3) nutrition
- 4) pampering activities
(or learning to be your own best friend)



Ideas to manage

- 1) Sleep – Changes in sleep patterns normally accompany grief. Work to establish a “comfort” routine at bedtime. Go to bed at about the same time each night, have something warm (i.e., milk with vanilla and cinnamon) to drink; have a relaxing bath, etc. Try not to go to bed before you are ready to sleep. If you have been sleeping, and then awoken and can’t go back to sleep within 10-15 minutes, get up for a while and do something else. Read a good book or magazine, watch TV, play relaxing music, look through a favorite photo album, work on a craft or project. Perhaps changing where you sleep will be helpful as well, especially if the bed itself represents too many painful memories.

Dreams – They help us cope with the reality of the death. They can also help us rethink our spiritual beliefs and philosophies of living. Lastly, dreams keep us connected with the person who died and we can complete some of our unfinished business with them as well.

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- 2) Exercise and Relaxation – Some form of daily exercise is critical in the management of stress, and can be a way to honor the person who has died ... by taking care of yourself. Exercise can raise your energy level, provide relaxation, and even help get rid of some of the angry feelings that are present. Exercise can also help to avoid deep depression. Exercise that is tailored to your personal style is important. Walking for an hour a day will make a difference in your day. When bereaved we often forget to breathe fully. Adding relaxation techniques to your daily rituals will encourage you to pay attention to your need to breathe and unwind your muscles as well as your mind. Work to breathe deeply, your abdomen moving up and down with each breath. Imagine that you inhale through your big toes and the air has to circulate to the top of your head and back to your toes before you can fully exhale! Try tensing and relaxing each muscle group in turn, starting with your feet and working up to your head. Practice slow, deep breathing. Transport yourself mentally to a pleasant scene involving all your senses (smell the scents, hear the breeze, be warmed by the sunshine, see the colors). Use relaxing music or purchase a relaxation tape to assist you in your journey.
- 3) Eating and Nutrition – There are some basic guidelines that will help you through the normal changes that accompany eating, stress and grief. Drink plenty of water. Avoid caffeine, alcohol and tobacco, as they also tend to interfere with sleep and nutrition. Other items to avoid are sugar, spice, and grease as they can compound gastric stress. Add some extra protein as your body needs more to cope with the physical demands of stress. If it's difficult to eat at all, try to eat simple, small and frequent meals (up to six per day). Keep healthy snacks available when overeating seems to take over. Limit "comfort" foods (high calorie, low nutrition) to one item a day when possible. Check with your doctor or pharmacist to find a suitable "stress formula" vitamin and mineral supplement.
- 4) Learning To Be Your Own Best Friend – There are many activities that will serve to pamper you during this difficult time. You may have learned to do these activities for *others*, but now it's time to offer them to yourself. Be creative. Write in your journal. Say "no" to overwhelming commitments and activities. Keep expectations and goals realistic for your circumstances. Participate in activities that are spiritually supportive. Find activities that let you just sit and remember. Find constructive and creative outlets. Find ways to control your thinking when you have done enough worrying or remembering that day. And find activities that offer you comfort. Practice and rehearse affirmations; reach out to others to decrease loneliness; and participate in activities that offer distraction as well. In the months soon after the death it is important to encourage yourself to have a daily routine. When you feel a little more stable, add new activities and see how you do. There are times when a little push is needed, but remember to be gentle with yourself!

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