

GRIEF EDUCATION AND SUPPORT MAILING PROGRAM

This newsletter is being provided
by the Bereavement Department of
The Kaiser Hospice Program



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Second in a Series of Five Newsletters

About This Newsletter

This newsletter is the second in our series. Around the fourth month is often the most difficult time in the bereavement process. You may be flooded with emotion and wonder if you are “going crazy.” This issue focuses on the thoughts and feelings which often arise. These feelings can be both positive and negative and it is often the negative ones, such as guilt, anger, remorse, etc., which give us the most difficulty. Many people do not realize that both the positive and negative feelings and thoughts are normal and do not mean you are “crazy.” Please be extra patient and kind to yourself as you adjust to your loss. Also, if you are having difficulty and would like a staff member from the Bereavement Program to phone you, please indicate that on the attached Mailing Program Response Form and mail the form to us.

We hope the information and suggestions presented here will be helpful to you.

*Pat Myers, LCSW
Bereavement Coordinator*

Those Hard to Handle Thoughts & Feelings

“I regret so much that we left so many things unsettled and not talked about.”

“If only I had insisted that he/she get help earlier. He/she might be alive now if I had been more firm.”

“I feel badly that I was sometimes impatient and short with her/him toward the end. I was so worn out, and I didn’t seem to have control over my own words and actions at times. I wish I had done better.”

“And now there are times when I’m angry at her/him and at life, for what has happened. He/she has left me with a lot of things to do, and I don’t even know how to do them. And on top of it all, I feel guilty about being angry.”

“I sometimes wonder if God knows and cares about me and what I’m going through. I even find myself getting angry with God, or wondering if there really is a God.”

These are some of the thoughts and feelings that come over people when going through a difficult time of bereavement.



It is important to know that it is not at all uncommon for us to have these experiences. We are not unusual, it shows we are normal human beings. The thoughts and feelings of loss, uncertainty, and helplessness that often come with the loss of those close to us are often also accompanied by thoughts and feelings like regret, guilt, anger, depression, etc. What a lot to handle!

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What will help us get beyond the strong negative thoughts and feelings that we sometimes have?

*Here are some steps
we can take:*

1 First of all, we can “own” our thoughts and feelings--that is, identify and acknowledge them. We can say to ourselves, and perhaps to someone else, “This really is me, and these really are the thoughts and feelings I’m having.” After all, we are human, and it seems to be human to have these kinds of thoughts and feelings. If we own the thinking and feeling as really belonging to us, we are less likely to run into trouble than if we “push them down” and deny them.

I Second, we can work at being accepting and forgiving of ourselves. Of course we make mistakes, just like the ones we lost through death sometimes made mistakes. We’re all imperfect! We sometimes do fail! We can all do with some forgiveness!

A Third, we can examine our thinking to see if it really makes sense. It helps to realize that our thinking and believing are the source of our feelings. For example, if I believe I have failed someone, I will probably feel guilty. Sometimes our expectations of ourselves are unrealistically high. So, let’s stop and take a good look at those expectations--at the ideas we are applying to ourselves, and see if we are thinking accurately...

B Fourth, if we come to the conclusion that we really have something to feel guilty about, we can talk it over with a trusted friend or counselor. If we have a religious faith that we live by, talk with God about it. Pastors, priests and other religious leaders are willing to help us work through feelings like guilt.



Δ Fifth, (and this may seem at first like a strange idea,) we can “talk” with the one who died--the husband, wife, family member or friend. We can imagine them present with us, and say to them what we need to say. And we can try to imagine what they might say back to us. This practice may help to settle old, unfinished business, and to work through hard-to-handle ideas and feelings. (Let’s also remember to tell the one who has died how much we love and miss them.)

E Sixth, we can give ourselves time to work through our complicated thoughts and emotions. Remember that grief is difficult for all of us. We can show consideration for ourselves by not expecting too much too soon.

Z Finally, and this last one is very important, we can work at being open with ourselves and a few others about what we are going through. Especially, talking with others who have gone through times of loss may be helpful.

*Gerald K. Hill, Chaplain
Mt Diablo Hospital Medical Center*

Grief: A Normal & Natural Response to Loss

Starting in childhood, many people have been taught to face life's crises with a "stiff upper lip," to "bear up and be strong." As we are influenced by these subconscious messages, we may become fearful that any show of emotion, particularly tears, might be interpreted by others as a sign of weakness (e.g., "He's falling apart," or "She's going to pieces.")

One of the tragedies in our society today is that many bereaved family members and friends experience their grief alone, feeling, "There must be something wrong with me. Certainly, no one I know ever felt or behaved in these strange ways." Fearful of embarrassment or of appearing "crazy" to others, many bereaved persons hide their true feelings of grief.

It is important for you to realize that what you are experiencing is a normal, natural, and expected response to the loss of a significant person in your life. Your grief reaction may manifest itself in any one of the following ways described by other bereaved persons:

- "I feel sick to my stomach. I just can't eat!"
- "I have trouble getting to sleep, and after I do, I only sleep for a few hours before I'm up again." Other physical reactions include weakness, pounding and/or heavy feeling in the chest, and/or shortness of breath.
- In your mind, you may be thinking:
 - "I can't seem to get organized. I'm up and down a hundred times during the day--here and there--never accomplishing anything." "I keep thinking about how it all happened--over and over again in my mind. I guess I'm trying to make sense out of it all."
 - "I think I'm losing my mind. I can't concentrate on anything. I can't even decide what to wear today."

Other mental manifestations include a lack of initiative,

forgetfulness, and anxiety. Other emotional reactions include feelings of relief, anguish, depression, and/or unexpected and uncontrolled crying.

- "When I'm feeling up, he's depressed; when he's up, I'm down."

- "I thought this would bring us closer together, instead we constantly bicker."

Other social reactions include a tendency to respond to others with anger or irritability and/or a loss of spontaneity.

- "If my faith were stronger, I would be able to handle this."

- "If I really believed, this wouldn't have happened."

Other spiritual reactions include anger with God, and/or doubts about God's existence.

Used with permission from Hilltop Hospice Grand Junction, Colorado

"I Haven't Got Time for the Pain"

Ways we try to avoid our painful feelings:

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|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| • Alcohol and drugs | • Quick new romance or remarriage | • Acting as if we've recovered when we haven't. |
| • Overworking | • Compulsive sex | HEALING |
| • Oversleeping | • Chatter | ř Feel your feelings... |
| • Keeping intensely busy | • Certain religious attitudes | ř Identify your feelings... |
| • Moving | • "I don't give a darn" | ř Accept your feelings... |
| • Intellectualizing | • Overspending | ř Express your feelings... |
| • Whirlwind social life | | |

What Do We Need During Grief?

Time

Time alone; and time with others who you trust and who will listen when you need to talk. Months 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 to help others -- 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.

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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.

Caring

Try to allow yourself to accept the expressions of caring from others, even though it may be uneasy and awkward. Helping a friend or close relative also suffering the same loss may bring a feeling of closeness with that person.

Goals

For a while, 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. You may need guidance or 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 pleasure in life itself.

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 all at once. So, we let in a little at a time.

Grief is an exhausting process emotionally. You need to replenish yourself.

Drugs May Not Be Helpful

Even medications used to help people get through periods of shock under a physician's guidance may prolong and delay the necessary process of grieving, if we are not careful. We cannot prevent or cure grief. The only way OUT is THROUGH.

Prepared by Judith Herr, M.S.S.

Hilltop Hospice

Tatlebaum, Judy. "The Courage to Grieve"

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Suggestions for Conquering Depression

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think of something you want that is available; then make a plan to go get it. • Go for a long walk. • Think of people who bring you up. Call one of them. • Listen to your favorite music. • Sing or chant. • Do something creative. • Take a shower, or a long warm bath. • Make a list of your strengths. Spend at least an hour concentrating fully on appreciating yourself. • Love a pet expressively. • Think of something you would enjoy doing for someone. Then do it! • Read a good book. • Plan a surprise for someone. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dance. • Forgive someone. • Consult a nutrition book and consider what you might add to your diet for pep and vitality. • Plan a trip or event that you think you would enjoy. • Think about enjoyable ways of relaxing. Choose one and do it! • Make an appointment for a massage. • Begin something you have been putting off for a long time. • Start your own humor book. Write down the funniest jokes you can remember. • Stop doing everything and just BE for awhile. • Make a list of things you are grateful for. • Scream! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think of a goal that will bring you joy. • Arrange a meeting with your favorite person. • Give something away. • Make a list of things you feel guilty about. Consider where you can make amends -- then burn the list! • Do breathing exercises for energy and calmness. • Clean up something. • Plan and anticipate the pleasure of eating your favorite meal. • Relive, with vivid imagination, an experience in your life which made you feel extremely loved. • Become, in your imagination, the person who has approved of you most. See yourself through his or her eyes; feel for yourself the feelings he or she has had for you.
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Source Unknown

