

GRIEF EDUCATION AND SUPPORT MAILING PROGRAM

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



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Third in a Series of Five Newsletters

About This Newsletter...

Keeping a Personal Journal

A Powerful Tool to Help You Through Your Loss

This mailing focuses on journal writing as a way of helping you with your loss. Many people keep journals and have offered the following suggestions.

- Keep your journal private so you will feel free to express your thoughts and feelings.
- Don't be concerned with grammar; using complete sentences or writing everything "just right." The idea is to be spontaneous and put down what you are feeling, thinking, hoping, struggling with, etc.
- To get started, it is often helpful to choose a topic and just start writing. Some ideas are presented in this newsletter to help you begin that process.

Some people who have trouble sleeping use journal writing to help them relieve anxieties/stresses and fall back to sleep.

We wish you the best and hope you find the ideas in this newsletter helpful.

*Pat Myers, LCSW
Bereavement Coordinator*

One of the most useful means for long-term self-development is the systematic use of an ongoing workbook, diary, or journal. Such a journal, thoughtfully done, can provide a structure to assist us in paying closer attention to our lives and in evoking and developing our understanding of ourselves and others. It acts as a "reflector" of the inner course we are charting day by day, and can give us the stimulation and support which many seek from the outside world.

The Purpose

The purpose of journal writing is to afford you the opportunity to reflect on the meaning and the significance of events in your life as they apply to your inner self.

The Focus

The focus of journal writing is on your unfolding awareness of the new meanings, values and inter-relationships you are discovering in yourself and in the world.

The Values

The act of presenting your ideas on paper forces you to formulate and clarify your thoughts and their accompanying feelings, thus enhancing the power and precision of your thinking.

Themes and Categories for Journal Writing

In addition to the narrative written material about your thoughts, feelings, and observations, you may also choose to include:

- Drawings or other visual materials (i.e., dreams, fantasies, symbols, or diagrams) that are useful in clarifying or expressing your ideas.
- Illustrations from magazines or newspapers which capture the thought or image you are writing about.
- Personally meaningful quotations you may have read or heard.

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Keeping a Personal Journal

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- A section entitled “Bright Ideas” may help you to brainstorm about all the possible alternatives to your problems.
- An inner dialogue (an imaginary conversation) between yourself and any other significant person or important event in your life.

This will help you clarify your relationships, and to develop understanding and insight about your problems.

The Outcome of Journal Writing

In time, you will find that your writing has been effective not only in helping you define specific problem areas, but also in helping you to work through your problems and in bringing about resolution and personal growth.

For future use, your journal presents you with a fine document which can be referred to when you encounter similar problems and in bringing about resolution and personal growth.

Happy Writing.

Reiller, Sara Unobskey. “Keeping a Psychological Journal,” *Psychosynthesis Workbook*, Vol 1. No. 2. 1975. pp. 109-114

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.

Choose 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.

Mary Ann Harter Janson, R.N., M.S.
Hilltop Hospice, Grand Junction, Colorado

Dealing with Anger

A Very Human Response to Grief

Expressing anger is not something that most of us were given permission to do while growing up. We might have been told to go to our room or calm down. As a child, we buy the message that anger is inappropriate and are seldom given examples of how to vent anger in a way that does not hurt someone else or ourselves.

Anger is a very human response to grief. We may be angry at ourselves, the doctor, God, or friends who have family members that we no longer have. We may even be mad at our loved one for dying and leaving us alone to deal with life without them.

It has been said that depression is often a result of anger turned inward. If we intellectualize or minimize our anger, it will not go away by itself. Our suppressed anger may find an avenue of expression through constant fatigue, continuous physical ailments or outbursts of anger and frustration in situations that appear to be unrelated to the death.

Some people have found that

anger can be safely expressed in the following ways:

- Writing an angry letter and tearing it up
- Screaming into a pillow
- Punching a pillow or mattress
- Scribbling with crayons
- Exercising/running, bicycling, boxing

While doing what has been suggested, verbalize either out loud or silently, the anger you are feeling. Verbalizing is an effective way of focusing your anger where it belongs.

Journaling or drawing can also release anger. At the top of a sheet of paper, you might want to write, “I am angry because...” and respond to this question with short sentences or sketches.

If you are not feeling anger at this time, respect that. There is not a magic formula that says you HAVE to be angry while grieving. Anger is simply a common and frequent response to grief for many people.

Follow your own heart and allow yourself to grieve in your own way, and in your own time.

Linda Cunningham

The Spiritual Dimension of Grief

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When someone dies, several questions may come to mind, such as, What happens in death? Is there an afterlife? What is my purpose?, and How do I live now?" These are questions that address the core of who we are, regardless of our religious or spiritual affiliation.

The answers may not be exactly the same for all of us because of our uniqueness. If we can allow ourselves to grieve openly and honestly, this can do much in helping us to resolve the spiritual challenges brought about by the death of a loved one.

Many people have strong religious beliefs and are actively involved in their church, temple, or religious home. If this is true for you, this is an important time to embrace your faith and surrender to the peace and strength it has to offer. Religious rites, fellowship, and support can carry us through some of the darkest moments in life.

Most of us already have the strength and wisdom we need to heal from our painful losses.

Unfortunately, because we fear the process of experiencing and expressing the pain, we look for ways to work around it instead of working through it. Avoiding this pain simply prolongs and complicates the grieving process. To live well does not mean to simply tolerate pain, but to learn what we can from it and eventually transcend its heavy load.



These moments can literally take our breath away and make life well worth living. Spirituality affects all of the senses and frequently is difficult to describe in words. It is during these moments that we have the capacity to transcend our fears or face our fears with a newness of strength. These are treasured moments of freedom.

Much of our pain is a result of reviewing our past or fearing our future. It is important to give ourselves permission to be alive and "in the moment." If, in the moment, there is a feeling of joy and contentment, hold on to that moment and let it bring peace and healing to your heart.

It is important that we allow ourselves the time to rejuvenate our spirit so a sense of meaning and purpose can be a part of our life again. Someone once wrote, "Bereavement is like a journey. We travel from a place of happiness searching for another place of happiness to call home." (Author unknown)

To live well does not mean to simply tolerate pain, but to learn what we can from it and eventually transcend its heavy load.

It is not uncommon for some people to experience a temporary period of withdrawal from social contacts and require a time for solitude. This can be valuable time as it provides us with the opportunity to reassess our life..

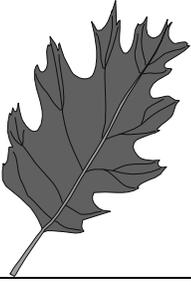
People are also needed, when we are ready, to remind us that we are not alone in our pain. It is other people who help remind us that we have choices as to how we choose to live the remainder of our life.

Sometimes it is helpful to relive the spiritual experiences in our life. Those experiences can be very simple in nature...a walk in the woods, listening to music, experiencing the comfort from a divine Presence, or getting a genuine hug from someone we love.

Religious rites, fellowship, and support can carry us through some of the darkest moments in life.

May you find the courage and commitment to find your spiritual home -- a home sturdy enough to house the ups and downs of life with dignity and grace.

Linda Cunningham
Director of Bereavement Services
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The Tasks of Grief

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Task One - Accepting the Reality of the Loss

involves coming to terms with the actual reality and magnitude of the loss and acknowledging its permanence. Attempts to minimize the loss or to deny its permanence will hinder the unfolding of the healing process. Overcoming one's sense of shock and the protective numbness which accompanies most losses is inherent in the accomplishment of this task.

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Task Two - Acknowledging the Pain of the Loss

involves experiencing and expressing the various feelings of grief inherent in adjusting to a loss including sadness, despair, anger, guilt, fear, etc. Avoidance of one's emotions or attempts to numb one's feelings through distraction, drug or alcohol use or by minimizing the

significance of the loss, delays the accomplishment of this task. Successful completion of this task involves overcoming both internal and external messages not to grieve. Validation and normalization of all grief affects facilitates healing, as does revisiting memories (good, bad and indifferent) and reviewing the nature of the lost relationship.

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Task Three - Adjusting to an Environment in Which the Deceased/Lost Object is No Longer Present

involves role changes and behavioral shifts necessitated by the absence of the individual or object. An identity crisis is inherent in this task as the individual struggles to answer the question, "Who am I and how do I go on living now?"

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Task Four - Emotionally Relocating the Deceased/Lost Object and Reinvesting

Experts have finally acknowledged that death ends a life, not a relationship. Survivors of a death must make the shift to a relationship which exists in memory rather than in daily, tangible, interaction. When this task is accomplished it frees the individual to reinvest in new relationships and meaningful activities.

Adapted from J. William Worden's
Grief Counseling, Grief Therapy

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