

Reflections...

on the grief journey

A Publication of Center for Hospice Care

Bereavement Newsletter

www.cfhcare.org

Issue 3

Center for Hospice Care is Here to Help

"The best part of being with other grieving teens is that I was able to openly talk about my feelings. I made a new family and I am very thankful!"

---Teen Client

Who Am I Now After My Loved One Has Died?

Our relationships include many roles: companion, parent, spouse, child, friend, grandchild, and partner. These roles can change after your loved one dies causing confusion and questions about your identity, your values and your beliefs. You might ask yourself, "Now that my loved one is gone, am I still a wife, a parent, a grandchild?" You may have been used to the role of being a caregiver for your loved one and now find yourself feeling lost and without a purpose in life. You may feel no one needs you or loves you like your loved one did.

If you lived with the person, their death can result in changes to your daily routines and you may be living alone for the first time in your life. Loneliness can be hard to deal with when you have lived with someone for years and now you must learn to eat, sleep and plan for your future without them. The practical problems of paying bills, cooking for one, household duties are no longer shared responsibilities and decisions are made without a partner to consult.

You may now be the only parent for your children resulting in additional parenting roles and responsibilities. A surviving parent may need you to become a caregiver for them, and if both parents have died, you have become the older generation. If a

sibling has died, your parents may expect you to take on some of the functions of that sibling and if you are the only surviving child, parents may depend on you in new ways.

Whether your loved one was your best friend, the love of your life, a beloved parent or your child, the relationship with the person who died was special and it does not end. But death brings changes both large and small and these changes can be overwhelming. It can help for you to acknowledge your human limits and realize it will take time and effort – and a sense of humor if possible – to adjust to the new roles. Friends and family can be a source of guidance and you get to choose the path you take. It is important to stay connected to the outside world and to cultivate and maintain social relationships. Places of worship, community organizations, volunteer opportunities, hobbies and other interests can help you make this adjustment.

If you are feeling overwhelmed, it can be difficult, but helpful to reach out to others instead of waiting for others to reach out to you. With time and support, you can learn to adapt and manage your different lifestyle and to feel comfortable with your life again.

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Coming In Future Issues

- Coping With Loneliness
- Forgiving Ourselves and Others
- Special Days – Coping with Anniversaries, Birthdays and Holidays

Anger

Every human being experiences anger because it is a natural emotion, but some of you have been taught that feeling angry is not okay. So you may feel uncomfortable whether anger is seen in others or is felt by you. The frustration, helplessness, and lack of control felt when a loved one dies can develop into anger. You may be angry that they died, and that you are left alone to grieve. Maybe you are angry with the doctor, hospital, funeral home, relatives, or friends that make hurtful or insensitive comments. You may have seen your loved one suffer. You may have prayed and feel angry at God that your prayers were not answered. It could be you are angry with yourself for things said or not said, for things you did or did not do. You can feel justified in your anger in some situations and guilty about your anger in others.

Feeling anger is natural, though it can be uncomfortable and you are responsible for finding constructive ways to manage it. Try things that distract your thoughts away from the anger until you can calm down, such as watching TV, listening to music, playing video games, sewing, reading, doing crossword puzzles. Talking with someone – a friend, family member, a support group, a counselor – can help a great deal. Physical activity and sports are good ways to let out some of the energy felt from feeling angry and writing down angry feelings can help you understand them better.

When you can manage your anger well, you can feel better about yourself. If coping with anger is a struggle, talking with a bereavement counselor might help.

Helping Children Grieve

Children grieve differently than adults. Their grief comes and goes quickly, sad one minute, laughing and playing the next. Often children do not show or talk about their grief in front of parents because they are afraid they will make their parent cry. It is good to let the child see that you are sad too and miss the person who died. Crying and sadness are natural reactions when we grieve.

Magical Thinking:

Younger children lack the experience, understanding, and vocabulary that adults have. If children are confused, they may feel guilty for things they imagine they have done. They are afraid their thoughts or words can have a magical effect and cause an illness or death. It is important for them to know nothing they wished, said or did caused the death to happen.

Adults Are Role Models:

Children learn how to grieve from their family members, especially parents. It is important that children can share their grief with their family, if they choose to. It is also important that parents not “protect” children from learning to cope with the death of a loved one. Adults are role models and are needed to reassure and comfort children. Parents need to teach children that death is a natural and normal part of life.

Sibling Differences:

Each child grieves differently so even children in the same family with the same loss do not grieve in the same way. There can be a great deal of difference in the way children in the same family grieve.

Talking It Out:

It is important to talk about grief as a family and encourage children to ask questions. Children can overhear adult conversations and instead of talking with you, they may talk with their friends to try and figure out your adult conversations. To prevent them from filling in the blanks and possibly feeling guilty that they caused the illness or death, talk to them directly and answer their questions truthfully, simply and in words they can understand.

Children Worry:

Following the death, children may cling to parents and worry about being separated from them. They need extra reassurance. Frequently children worry that someone else will die and they wonder who will take care of them. This worry can fade with time with your reassurance, but if the child has nightmares or if you are concerned about new behaviors exhibiting anxiety, fear or anger, please call the office to talk with a bereavement counselor.

Suggestions:

- Provide opportunities to talk about their loved one
- Share memories and stories
- Provide reassurance
- Continue with routines
- Have your child attend a Grief Support Group
- Remember that death does not end the bond of the relationship

Teens and Grief

Does a teen grieve the same as an adult? There are similarities and differences. While grief is a natural response to loss, both teens, and adults often resist grieving. Both can be fearful of the strong feelings, thoughts, and physical reactions. Feeling as though one is not in control can be frightening.

Every person's response is unique. Some respond with sadness and crying; others with humor and laughing. Like adults, teens may have spiritual questions regarding death and afterlife. For both adults and teens strong intense feelings can be overwhelming.

Grieving teenagers that exhibit the following behaviors may be struggling with the grief process and could benefit from talking with a counselor.

- Impulsive Behaviors
- Severe arguing with authority figures
- Physical fights
- Risky behaviors
- Declining grades due to inability to concentrate
- Guilt feelings
- Fearful of the future
- Suicidal thoughts
- Drugs or alcohol use
- Behaviors that are out of character

Developmental Stages

Normal adolescence is a time of peer belonging, development of social skills and establishment of self identity. These normal,

but major developmental issues may affect the grief process. As a result, teens may put their grief on hold until they are able to handle complicated emotions. Adults may worry that teens are not dealing with their grief, but teens may be delaying their grief until they feel they can handle it. For example 7th and 8th graders are developing social skills. Grief at this time may make them unsure of themselves. While 17 and 18 year olds may find it more difficult to prepare to launch out of the family into adulthood.

Other Influences on the Teen's Grief Process

- Support system of the teen (family, friends, school and church)
- Circumstances of the death (expected or unexpected, were they the caregiver, was it a violent death)
- Nature of the relationship with the deceased (close, conflicted, harmonious)
- Emotional and developmental age of teen (mature, immature, early or late teens)
- Major changes the death has brought about (different school, residence, friends, social standing, role in the family)

Counseling

Teens that exhibit behaviors that are a concern, could benefit from seeing a counselor. Counseling can also be helpful to teens that seem to be adjusting well (to gain understanding of the death, and what they will be facing in the months ahead). Counseling helps them to see their feelings as natural. Call the nearest office for more information or to schedule an appointment.

"Are You Struggling?"

All of us struggle with our beliefs at times when we face unanswerable questions. Grief is such a time. Our loved one has gone from us – but where? We may speak of "a heaven," "a better place," "going home." Yet, none of us have ever been there or can describe the unknowable.

When we cannot know something, we may form our own belief system. In many cases we have inherited our beliefs. Grief gives us an opportunity to look at what we believe and to use it for support, or to reject it and possibly move in a whole new direction of faith.

We may ask: "Where is God?" "Why did this happen to me?" "Is my loved one near, or far removed from me?" The questions are many, the answers illusive. But the struggle to redevelop our beliefs can lead to a deeper understanding and meaning for our present suffering and loneliness and for life.

Recommended Books

The Grieving Child: A Parent's Guide
by Helen Fitzgerald

When a Friend Dies: A Book for Teens about Grieving and Healing
by M. Gootman

When Dinosaurs Die
by L. Brown (ages 6-12)

The Invisible String
by Patrice Karst (ages 3+)

Contact the nearest office for a book list

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The Day of the Robin



As I walked out the back door of our house I noticed a robin splashing around the edge of the birdbath, having fun. Then it dawned on me... for the first time in a very long time I was again aware of the world around me and was even taking delight in the antics of this silly bird. I surprised myself, and the robin, when I laughed out loud.

It had been some time since laughter had come out of my mouth. When people ask me how I am doing, I usually respond, "Oh, I have good days and bad days." I know a bad day! It is when I don't want to get out of bed to face anyone; or when I can't stop crying for hours. So what makes a good day? I believe it is when I am able to see the beauty around me, like this day when I saw that robin. Rarely am I able to explain or plan such a thing; it just happens. I have discovered that it is important for me to seize the moment when goodness is present when I can experience joy again.

If you would like to stop receiving Reflections, please contact the nearest office.