

Reflections...

on the grief journey

A Publication of Center for Hospice Care

Bereavement Newsletter

www.cfhcare.org

Issue 4

*"Grief changes us. It is incorrect to speak of grief as something one gets over. We do not "get over" grief. We are changed by it."
---Phyllis Silverman*

Where Has Everyone Gone?

Almost every bereaved person has probably asked this question. Friends and family assure us they will be there for us when a loved one dies. In the shock and disruptions following the death family, friends and neighbors wanting to help often surround us. As time goes by most of these people will return to their normal routines and are no longer as available to us as they had been.

How do we deal with this loss of support at a time when we feel most vulnerable? Some of us may carry on stoically, pulling ourselves "up by our boot straps." Others may complain bitterly that life is unfair and that just when they needed everyone, they

disappeared. A few may just withdraw into themselves and grieve alone.

Our family, friends and co-workers do not mean to desert us. Frequently they are overwhelmed by our grief and feel helpless around us. Some may avoid talking about the death for fear of upsetting us. Family members are also grieving the loved one's death and may have only enough energy to care for themselves.

How can we help ourselves if this situation occurs in our lives? Although it may be difficult, we can consider that those who made promises meant what they said at the time, and may now find that other circumstances take

their time and attention. We are now challenged to deal with our thoughts and feelings. We may need to reach out to others, such as a Center for Hospice Care Bereavement Counselor, members of our faith community or a mental health counselor. We can also attend a grief support group.

Other ways to cope with the disappointment and/or anger we feel is through creative expression. This can include writing down our thoughts and feelings, drawing/painting, singing, and gardening which can help release tension.

For each of us there may be different solutions. Find what works best for you.

Call Us Any Time

(574) 255-1064
Mishawaka

(574) 264-3321
Elkhart

(574) 935-4511
Plymouth

(219) 575-7930
La Porte

The Loving Wisdom of a 4 Year-Old

Upon seeing his elderly neighbor crying on his porch because he had just lost his wife, the little 4 year old boy climbed onto the old gentleman's lap and just sat there with him.

When his mother asked what he had said to the old man, the little boy simply said, "Nothing, I just helped him cry."

— Anonymous



Rituals are Ways of Loving

RITUALS are the way you commemorate and celebrate meaningful moments. Your life includes rituals because they are important to human nature. They help you to express the thoughts and feelings you have on special occasions, with laughter during times of joy and with tears in times of sorrow.

Grief rituals can help you remember the love you have for those who have died. They become most important on days you celebrated with your loved ones: anniversaries, birthdays, holidays, and family gatherings.

Use your creativity to develop your own way of celebrating your loved one's life. Here are some rituals that many have found meaningful.

- Light a candle on those important days.
- Make a quilt using pieces of their favorite clothes.
- Write a reflection, story, or prayer to share at a family gathering.
- Plant a memory garden in your yard.
- Make a donation to a favorite charity in memory of your loved one.
- Create a Memory Scrapbook and take time to add to it on those special days.
- Drop flowers in the river after wrapping a note to your loved one around the stem.
- Play meditative music, sit alone in candlelight and write a love letter.
- Make a toast in honor of your loved one at a dinner of friends and family.
- Plant a tree or dedicate a bench with an inscription in a public or private place.
- Have a "memory evening" using family photographs or videos.

Rituals are healing and they can be very personal, bringing laughter and tears. Rituals can help you throughout the year and over the years. Do whatever brings you comfort and peace.

Coming In Final Issue

- Anticipating the First Anniversary of a Loved One's Death
- A Time to Hope
- How Do You Know When You're Feeling Better

Birthdays, Anniversaries and Other Special Days

Celebrating special times may be difficult after the death of a loved one. These days can be a painful reminder they are gone. Even your own birthday may be a sad time when they are not here to celebrate with you. Everybody has different ways of coping with these occasions.

A daughter explained that celebrating her own birthday without her mother was sad: "Several days before my birthday, I realized that for the first time in years I would no longer get a phone call or a card from my mother – something I took for granted all those years."

Many people have found it helpful to have a plan in place for special days. "Our son died leaving us and his siblings devastated. As his birthday approached our family sat down together to plan how we would spend the day. We decided everyone would take the day off work or school and fill it with activities our son loved. We went to the zoo, bowling, a movie, the playground, lunch and dinner, and topped it off with cake and ice cream. Although the memories of his life brought tears, we felt it was a fitting tribute to him."

Birthday celebrations brought this family together in a meaningful way: "My wife, Susan, died of cancer. Each year since her death, the kids and I have celebrated her birthday with a family dinner and pineapple upside-down cake. It was Susan's favorite. The family celebrated her life and told the grandchildren – those too little to remember her or those born after Susan died – about the wonderful person she was."

Wedding anniversaries, the date a couple met, Valentine's Day and other holidays may also require special consideration. Buying yourself a bouquet of flowers or a present may be comforting to a grieving person. Some plan a dinner with family or friends. Others may feel more comfortable spending the day alone in special reflection of their loved one. Choose to do whatever feels most comfortable for you.

"May love be what you remember most."
– Anonymous

Do Men and Women Grieve Differently?

Instead of looking at gender differences, it is more accurate to look at the styles of grieving along a continuum. Men and women on the left side of the line use an intuitive style of grieving and those on the right side use an instrumental style. Grievors near the middle blend the styles and experience elements from both. The style a person uses may be influenced by the type of death, how the death happened and the person's connections to that loved one.

In addition to blended grieving styles, some people find themselves grieving in a style that is different than usual. For example, someone who does not usually cry, may find themselves crying a lot and someone who usually cries when sad, may not be able to cry. This can be very uncomfortable. If you are struggling with your grief reactions, it might help to call and talk with a bereavement counselor.

Grief Styles Continuum



Intuitive Griever - Feelings	Instrumental Griever - Thinking
FEELINGS are strong and often feel overwhelming.	THINKING overrides feeling. Feelings may feel less intense. There is often a reluctance to talk about feelings.
Expressions of feelings such as crying and suffering mirror the inner experience.	Mastery of oneself and the environment are most important.
Successful coping strategies help with the experience and expression of feelings.	Problem-solving is valued as a strategy for mastery of feelings and control of the environment in creating the new normal
Experience prolonged periods of confusion, inability to concentrate and disorganization.	Commonly experience brief periods of confusion, forgetfulness, obsessiveness.
Physical tiredness and anxiety may result	Energy levels may be high, and signs of grief reactions to the loss go unnoticed.

*Adapted from ABRPO.org website article

Forgiveness

The grief process includes experiencing and coping with the many thoughts and feelings that surface. Feelings are not right or wrong but some can be very uncomfortable. They are a response to the circumstances you face and what you do with them can lead you toward or away from adjusting and functioning well.

Many issues can arise during your grief. You may have negative thoughts and feelings toward the doctors, nurses, friends, family, God, yourself or even the person who died. These thoughts and feelings are a natural part of the grief process. Over time, you can choose to hold on to your resentments or find ways to forgive.

In Robin Casarjian's book, *Forgiveness: A Bold Choice for a Peaceful Heart*, she states, "Holding on to anger

or resentment is like holding onto a burning coal with the intention of throwing it at another, but all the while we're burning ourselves." Even when your thoughts and feelings make sense, choosing to work through them and forgive moves you toward healing and away from "burning" yourself.

Forgiveness encourages you to let go of negative thoughts and feelings. Forgiveness is a matter of the spirit and may require that you allow others to guide and strengthen you through their counsel. The journey from the past, through the present and into the future is often a slow one. You will need patience with yourself as you move along the way. You are not alone on the grief journey.

Center for Hospice Care

Life Transition Center
501 Comfort Place
Mishawaka, Indiana 46545
(574) 255-1064

112 South Center Street Suite C
Plymouth, Indiana 46563
(574) 935-4511
(800) 413-9083

22579 Old US 20 East
Elkhart, Indiana 46563
(574) 264-3321
(800) 413-9083

309 West Johnson Road Suite A
La Porte, Indiana 46350
(219) 575-7930
(800) 413-9083

www.cfhcare.org

©2021 Center for Hospice Care

Things To Do When Feeling Blue....

The journey through grief is full of hills and valleys. How can you confront those difficult times when the grief you experience is making you feel sad and blue?

- **Believe in yourself...** It gives you courage and strength to continue on.
- **Write a letter...** It is a good way to express your feelings to someone else or even to yourself.
- **Involve yourself in a meaningful activity....** It will help give purpose to your life.
- **Laugh again...** Humor can help us cope with grief valleys and laughing is okay. It does not mean you are not missing your loved one.
- **Volunteer...** Helping others, helps you.
- **Take a walk...** Walking is a health activity, with your doctor's approval. It is energizing and being in nature and with other people provides a sense of connection to the world.
- **Make plans for enjoyable activities...** Spend time with friends and family
- **Do something to surprise someone else...** You can feel better about yourself when you are making someone else feel good.
- **Read a book...** It can help you relax and refocus your thoughts.
- **Watch a video...** This can be another way to change your mood.
- **Meditate and/or Pray...** It is a way of maintaining a positive connection with your loved one and your spirituality.

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

Center for Hospice Care
choices to make the most of life™

Reflections: A bereavement publication of Center for Hospice Care
501 Comfort Place
Mishawaka, IN 46545