

LIVING WITH THE LOSS OF YOUR LOVED ONE



St. Anthony's Hospice
CELEBRATING THE JOURNEY



GRIEF INFORMATION PACKET

Grief Care and Support from St. Anthony's Hospice

On behalf of St. Anthony's Hospice, please accept our sympathy upon the loss of your loved one. We believe that the needs of our families and friends continue after the death; therefore we want to make you aware that Hospice support is available to you throughout the coming months.

Often, when the sadness of the funeral is over, the hard work of grieving begins. The meaning of bereavement is the feeling of being "torn apart". You may feel that grief is tearing you and your world apart. Please remember that grief is not a problem to be cured. It is simply a statement that you have loved someone.

A mixture of feelings is normal. You may feel deep sadness, anger, or a loss of control. Some days, you may feel as if you are "going crazy". Some people have trouble with eating or sleeping habits or other daily routines.

Your life is forever changed when a person who you love dies. Many times, families have questions about the feelings that they are experiencing as they grieve the loss of a loved one. Please know that the bereavement staff at St. Anthony's is available to help you answer questions and to listen to you when you need to talk. We believe that when people share their grief with others, it becomes easier for them to grow toward peace and understanding.

We are available to help you in whatever way that you are most comfortable—by phone, in person, or even by email. Over the next fifteen months, we will send you written information on grief. From time to time, we will be offering grief education and support meetings as well as holiday support. If there are children in your family who have been affected by this loss, we will gladly provide support for them, as well.

We welcome your call whenever you need to talk or feel that there is a way that we can be of service to you. Simply call 826-2326, to speak with someone who cares about you.

Enclosed is some information gathered from the shared experiences of others who have lived through the loss of a loved one. We hope that we can be of some help to you as you struggle with the changes in your life.

Respectfully,

**St. Anthony's Hospice
Bereavement Team**

The Journey of Living with Loss and Grief

Phases of the Grief Process

The death of a loved one is considered the most stressful of all of life's changes. Your grief may be the most pain you have ever known. Grieving your loss is like a journey toward healing. In the beginning, the road is rocky and difficult. At times, it may seem impossible to see what path lies ahead. But, over time, your journey will become easier as healing begins.

As difficult as it may be to accept, what is happening to you is natural. There are some common experiences that people often feel after the death of a loved one. You may not experience all of these. You may not experience them in the same order. You may move back and forth between different phases along your journey. Grief often seems to come in waves of intense feelings that may be triggered by something—an unexpected comment or song. When these waves of grief hit, you may just sit and stare or maybe even experience odd laughter or other unexpected reactions. Knowledge is power—take a moment to read and understand what is considered normal grieving so that you can feel more comfortable with your own expressions of grief.

Don't let anyone take your grief away from you. You deserve it, and you must have it. If you had a broken leg, no one would criticize you for using crutches until it healed. Grief is a major wound. It does not heal overnight. You must have time and crutches until you heal. Grieving is nature's way of healing a broken heart."

Doug Manning,
Don't Take My Grief Away

Phases of the Grief Process:

Shock & Numbness

Shock is often experienced as feeling physically numb or as though one's emotions are frozen. It may feel like stunned disbelief or a very unreal, terrible nightmare. Many times, people sleep or eat either too much or not enough. Some may not be able to go to work while others feel high levels of energy and work more than usual. During this phase of grief, you may have difficulty concentrating and making decisions. Your mind may be reliving the events surrounding the death over and over. You may start a task, then wander aimlessly through your house and forget to finish the task that you have started.

These experiences often happen during the first month or so of grief and may be our way of trying to comprehend such an overwhelming event. The feeling of unreality may actually allow us to function through the aftermath of the death. Other people may remark on how someone in grief appears to be unemotional or strong when they are really in shock. It is very important to understand that people go through this stage at different rates. Try not to interpret one's lack of emotion as a lack of caring. Actually, the stronger the grief, the more profound the shock a person may experience. Try to recognize shock in yourself and in others in order to avoid unhelpful guilt or blaming. If you allow these feelings and acknowledge that they are normal, it can reduce fear and prevent families from criticizing and distancing from each other.

This is a time when support for one another is vital.

Phases of the Grief Process:

Feeling the Pain—Yearning & Searching

Gradually, the numbness gives way to the more intense emotions of grief. While it still may be hard to believe that the person is actually gone, you may now also feel intense sadness, anger, and guilt. Memories of the person or thoughts about the experiences surrounding the death may fill every waking moment. You may wish you could just “turn off your mind.” You may feel a loss of control over your emotions—you may not know where or when you’ll begin to cry or scream, or if you’ll be able to stop.

This roller coaster of emotions may include anger, resentment, guilt, helplessness, loneliness, questioning of beliefs, inability to think straight, loss of interest in your usual activities of life. Different people will experience these feelings at different intensities. You may feel intense anger directed toward the person you have lost, toward the hospital staff or others with whom you experienced the death, and toward God. You may also experience the “if onlys”—an intense reaction of guilt and questioning of how we or others could have or should have done things differently to prevent the death. Your normal activities may feel pointless to you. They may require more energy than you feel that you can give. It is ironic that society around us begins to expect us to “get on with life”—to go back to work or school or to assume daily responsibilities—while we begin to feel worse than ever. You may feel that the world is moving, but you have stopped.

A grieving person may also feel such deep longing for the lost person that they find themselves searching for the person. Some people’s reactions may include an awareness of “seeing” the deceased for a moment or hearing the door at the time they used to come home, while at the same time knowing that these things are not so. This part of grief may be a way for a grieving person to begin to let go.

How can you survive this phase? Try to understand that the intensity of your emotions is normal. It is important that you try to express them in whatever way that you feel is appropriate. Give yourself permission to let your pain take its natural course. Try writing or journaling, talking, crying, or making something to help you hold onto the memory of your loved one. If there are tasks that are too exhausting or emotional to complete, reach out to your family and friends who have offered support.

If you have utilized medications such as anti-depressants or sleeping pills during the first traumatic days of your grief, talk with your doctor about starting to reevaluate that use. Often, medications will only delay the body and mind’s natural grieving process. It is also not uncommon to want to run away or escape from this painful time. If your feelings become too overwhelming to handle alone, the St. Anthony’s Bereavement Team can walk with you through this phase in your journey.

Phases of the Grief Process

Disorientation—Sorting Things Out

Several months into your grief process, the more intense, emotional, acute feelings of grief may evolve into a deeper and darker sense of loss and loneliness.

People who have been a great support in the early months may return to their formal roles. They may even expect you to “get over” your grief and to return to your “normal” life. While others appear to have put the loss behind them, it is likely impossible for you to “simply forget”. You may have an even more intense need to remember and to talk about your experience at the same time that the outside world is beginning to distance itself from your loss. You may continue to be preoccupied with thoughts about your loved one and have difficulty finding interest in things that you used to enjoy. You may question whether or not you’ll ever feel better or feel normal again.

This is an especially difficult time for couples. You are correct if you feel alone in your grief—no one else feels the way you do. Grief is a very unique to each person. We each grieve at different rates and intensities. In a relationship, one partner may grieve earlier

and more intensely while the other partner’s grief may not appear to be as expressive or intense. This creates stress on the relationship, as the partner in the midst of intense grief may perceive the other partner as cold or distant. One partner may feel that the display or feeling of acute unhappiness or emotion is holding onto the past. This person may appear to return to normal functioning earlier, but may actually grieve more intensely over a longer period of time.

Although your feelings may not be as raw as they were in the beginning, it is still important to openly express them. If these feelings are bottled up, they will eventually emerge in the form of physical symptoms. If you are experiencing headaches, difficulty sleeping, gastrointestinal disorders, thoughts of suicide, or find yourself medicating with drugs or alcohol, it is important to reach out for support. This may be a time when the support of other bereaved families or individual sharing with a grief counselor may be effective for you. Remember—there is always a light at the end of the tunnel.

Phases of the Grief Process

Finding Hope

After weeks, months, or even years of suffering, you may have wondered, “Will I ever feel normal again?” Of course, you will never forget the person who died. You will always love him or her. But as you begin to heal, you will begin to feel the strength to create a new normal in your life. You will start to have more good days than bad. You will begin to remember your loved one and the special things about the life you shared with him or her, instead of the actual events that surrounded the death itself. Some days, you may feel the need to hang on to your grief. Or, you may encounter a memory or experience that triggers those intense feelings of grief again. Those waves of emotion pass more quickly now. As you remember, you may still be touched, but not overwhelmed, by sadness.

You may recognize the beginning of this hope and healing when you feel the ability to find joy in life again. You are now strong enough to face your future. You will come to an understanding that it is

possible to have a full life again, though it will be different from the life before your loss.

At this point in the journey of grief, it is often common for people to be much more aware of the value and preciousness of life. People are more likely to focus on the present rather than worrying about the future. People tend to be less materialistic and career driven. They are aware of the uncertainty and tragedy of life that they don’t take things for granted as they did before their death experience. Most of all, death and grief makes us all aware of our inner strength. We cannot change the past, but we can be glad for the strength and courage that we have gained through our journey of grief.

Reference

Wiseman, MD, Barbara. Stages of Grief Series. Bereavement Magazine. May-October 1998.

Journey Toward Wholeness

All is unfolding as it should.

I will know the whole story someday.

There is a reason for life.

There is a reason for death.

know beyond a shadow of a doubt that love goes beyond the
grave.

I have developed a lot of **gratitude**:

For my **relationships**, both past and present, especially those
who support my healing.

For the **initiative** I've exercised to sometimes step out of my
comfort zone to help myself and others.

For the **independence** I've developed in creating personal
space and distance when I've needed it for my own health and
wellbeing.

For **humor** and the healing salve that its been in transforming
the blackness into color.

For the **insight** that has helped me to sustain me and support
others as we have all sought to understand the WHY?

For my **faith** and for **understanding** the great resource of
compassion.

Kalischuk & Hayes. Omega, Vol 48 (1), 45-67, 2003-2004.

Signs of Normal Vs. Complicated Grieving

The normal process of grief may take a year or two, but along the way, you will notice observable progress toward a state of acceptance. If you experience the following signs of normal grieving, you are handling your grief in a healthy manner.

Signs of Normal Grieving

- I can experience moments of joy, although I miss my loved one and often feel sad.
- I sometimes feel angry or anxious, but I am able to share these feelings with others.
- I can ask for support and/or I can accept support when others offer it to me.
- I feel guilty or sad at times, but I am still able to enjoy life.
- At times I feel lonely, but I know that I can manage it as my sadness begins to lessen.
- However, you may experience difficulty along your journey that hinders you from continuing along your road toward peace. Many of the symptoms below are common in the early months following a death. But, if these symptoms persist, it is important for you to reach out for additional support by contacting your St. Anthony's Bereavement team, doctor, or clergy.

Signs of Complicated Grieving

- I am unable to express my feelings
- My health seems to be getting worse over time.
- I have no appetite and have been losing weight
- I have been overeating and am gaining weight
- I have thoughts of ending my own life.
- I feel responsible for my loved one's death.
- I feel sad and alone most of the time and don't have any interest in anything or anybody.
- I have thoughts and emotions that interfere with my work and other important areas in my life.
- I am using alcohol or drugs (including prescriptions) to cope with things.

Center on Aging at the John A Burns School of Medicine at the University of Hawaii. (2004). The healing journey: Help for the bereaved. Honolulu, HI: Author.

Myths about Grief

Many people who have not experienced a loss have difficulty understanding exactly how you feel. This leads to some commonly held myths about grief that you may encounter along your journey. These myths can be hurtful and can impede your progress toward healing and hope. Watch out for the following statements:

Myth 1: You should be over this by now

WRONG! Grief support is needed over a long period of time, as everyone's grief is unique and is influenced by many factors. Some cultures have a set time for mourning, after which the person is expected to return to "normal" life. Although this may help with the grieving process, it is now a common belief that we do not ever get over the loss. Instead, we learn to adapt to life without the person and to integrate the loss into our lives.

Myth 2: Time heals all wounds.

WRONG! There may always be a hole in your life that used to be filled by your loved one. Although time may never fill that hole, it may bring a relief to those first raw emotions that you feel in the beginning of your journey.

Myth 3: If you can't cry, you can't really grieve.

WRONG! Some people wear their emotions on their sleeves and have the ability to openly cry and share their feelings. Other people are more reserved about public expressions of feeling and emotion. Although crying can be beneficial, one can still release that emotion and energy in different ways. Crying is simply one way to express emotions during the journey of grief.

Myth 4: Men aren't good at grief. Real men shouldn't cry.

WRONG! There are commonly held social, gender, or cultural expectations that may make men feel restricted from sharing their grief. Due to these expectations, men may tend to hold back their emotions, or express them in different ways. On the other hand, many men are open about their feelings and emotions to people that they trust. It is harmful to stereotype men as unemotional or unwilling to accept support. Men may or may not utilize it, but it is still important to offer help and support during their time of grief.

Center on Aging at the John A Burns School of Medicine at the University of Hawaii. (2004). The healing journey: Help for the bereaved. Honolulu, HI:

Author

Strategies for Coping with Grief

1. Go Gently. Don't rush too much. Your body needs energy for repair.
2. Admit to yourself that you are having feelings of grief and allow yourself to experience these painful feelings.
3. Don't take on new responsibilities right away. Don't overextend yourself. Keep decision making to a minimum.
4. Accept help and support when offered.
5. When asked, "How are you doing?" you do not have to respond with "Just fine" if you are not fine. Share only what how much you want to share, and with whom you want to share. But do find at least one person to whom you can talk about your grief.
6. Ask for help. No one can read our minds. It is important to find someone who cares, who understands, and with whom you can talk freely. It is okay to need comfort.
7. Be patient with yourself. Healing takes time.
8. Remove "should" and "ought" from your vocabulary. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Instead, say to yourself, "I will do this." Make your own choices, not what anyone else wants you to do or say.
9. Lean into the pain. It cannot be outrun. Let the grief/healing process run its full course.
10. Through this emotional period, it is okay to feel depressed. Crying does make you feel better.
11. If you are returning to your work or school routine and find that you cry easily throughout the day, set aside some time for this. Say, "I will grieve at 7 pm" Then, at that time, get the albums out, or listen to special music and allow yourself to grieve.
12. If you have a plan to do something that you feel will trigger your grief, set aside a time (at least a couple of hours beforehand) to be alone and allow yourself to grieve.
13. If Sundays, holidays, etc. are especially difficult times, schedule activities that you can find particularly comforting to fill these times.
14. Seek the help of a counselor or clergy if your grief becomes too much for you to handle alone.
15. Try to get adequate rest. Go to bed earlier. Avoid caffeine. Exercise. Activity offers an opportunity to work off frustration and aids sleep.
16. Good nutrition is important. Decrease junk food. Eat a balanced meal.
17. Keep a journal. It is a good way to understand what you are feeling or thinking and a way to get your thoughts out of your head. When you go back later to reread your words, you will see that you are getting better.
18. Read. There are many helpful books on grief. If you understand grief, it may be a little easier to handle.

19. Try to socialize with family and friends when you feel up to it. Don't feel guilty if you have a good time. Your loved one would want you to be happy.
20. It is ok to be angry. You may be angry at yourself, at God, your spouse, your deceased loved one. You may just be angry in general. Don't push it down—let it out! Hit a pillow. Scream. Exercise. Kick empty boxes or slam a door.
21. Instead of getting rid of pictures or belongings of your loved one, put them away for a while until your acute grief passes. Then you can choose what to do with them without regretting it later.
22. Do not have unrealistic expectations for yourself. Grief takes time. It comes and goes like the tide.
23. Do things a little differently, but try not to make too many changes. Avoid making any big, life altering decisions with the first year of grief, if possible. If this is not possible, think through your decisions carefully. Decide what is best for you, and then do it without regrets.
24. Plan new interests. Join a class—yoga, exercise, bible study, education, or a craft. Read. Learn something new. Rediscover old interests, activities or friends.
25. Plan things to which you can look forward—a trip, lunch with a friend. Healing begins as you begin to find more joy than sadness and when you begin to build a new life with new memories.
26. Before going to bed, write down a goal of something that you want to accomplish the next day. This gives you a reason to give up in the morning.
27. Find quotes, posters, poems, prayers, or bible verses that are helpful to you. Post them where you can see them or memorize them to recite during difficult moments in your day.
28. Pray or talk to your loved one. Create ways to remember him or her throughout your daily ritual.
29. Be good to yourself. Take a hot bath. Take a walk to get some fresh air. Go to a movie.
30. Do something for someone else. Join a volunteer or support group. Helping others can help ease the pain. Reach out and touch someone.
31. Be determined to work through your grief. Find the courage to face it.
32. Remember, you will be better! Hold on to HOPE. Some days you may feel like you simply exist. Better days will be back.
33. Simply stated—put balance back into your life. Pray. Rest. Work. and Play.

If you find that you spend more time contemplating dying instead of living, or if your grief has interfered with your ability to function with daily life, find a counselor with whom you can talk. St. Anthony's Hospice offers confidential grief counseling at no cost to you. Do not give up your life to the feelings of grief—allow us to help.

Words, Words, Words by: Darcie D. Sims

Words; just words. Often spoken in an attempt to ease the pain of grieving the death of someone we love. But, instead of bringing relief, those words just seem to add to the hurt, the confusion, the anger, the grief. There are no words that will make it all right that someone we loved has died. But there are words that can soothe the hurt, ease the loneliness and add to the healing.

I don't think people are trying to hurt grievers. They just seem to engage their mouths before their brains. Or maybe what they were planning on saying sounded pretty good in their heads, but by the time those words of hope made the journey from their minds to their mouths, something happened. And those words came out, sending hurt instead of hope across the space between us.

What are you trying to say? Are you trying to fill the silence between us, show how much you care or how much you know? Do you think words will help when a heart is broken? Why do we hide behind words, any words, when a hug or a simple touch on the arm would say so much more? Have we forgotten the power of presence? Do we fear silence because it might mean we have nothing to say?

Why must a moment between friends be filled with noise or empty platitudes or meaningless sounds of hollow comfort? Why can't two people simply be in the presence of each other, allowing that great strength to flow between them without any words to interrupt the message?

"He's in a better place." ~
"At least you have other children" ~
"She's better off now/not in any pain." ~
"Where's your faith? You should be happy for him" ~
"God needed another flower in His garden." ~
"Time heals all things." ~
"You'll be better tomorrow." ~
"You can't stay sad the rest of your life." ~
"Your loved one wouldn't want you to be so sad." ~
"You can have another baby" ~
"You were so happy together. Be grateful for that." ~
"At least he didn't suffer." ~
"She was so young." ~
"You didn't really get to know her that well".

ARRRGGG! Words! Words! Words meant to help that only add to the hurt. Give me silence, please! Not emptiness...silence. Not loneliness...silence. Don't not come, but come silently. Sit on my couch, hold my hand, share a cookie, hand me a tissue.

Come, but leave your words of hollow hope behind. No words can speak more eloquently than the shared silence of presence. Come sit beside me. Hold me. Touch me. Be with me, but leave the noise behind.

Are we afraid that silence will kill us? Are we afraid that we will say “the wrong thing”? (What is the right thing?) Are we afraid that we will “remind” the bereaved of their loss? (Do you think we will ever forget it?) “Time heals all things.” “You’ll be better tomorrow.” “You can’t stay sad the rest of your life.” “Your loved one wouldn’t want you to be so sad.”

If only I could think of something to say in return! But my mind as well as my body and soul have gone numb. I am frozen and I can’t think of anything to say. Sometimes I am so shocked that I cannot believe I heard what you said, or maybe you don’t even realize what you said.

“Be happy she’s healed now.” “Why are you so sad?” “We have gathered here to not to mourn the loss of....but rather to celebrate his life.”

Words. Just words. You’d think they wouldn’t hurt so much, but they do. Sometimes it really is better not to say anything. That doesn’t mean don’t do something... it means don’t use words to fill up the space that sadness occupies. By all means, do something! Bring

flowers, a casserole (not tuna, please), chocolate cookies, napkins, paper towels. Come help with the laundry, the childcare, the mail, the dusting. Drop off a ham, a turkey, a hug. Send a note, a lemon meringue pie, a donation to my loved one’s favorite charity. Slip a note into my pocket, a card in my mailbox, a hand into my empty one.

Share a memory, a laugh, a moment. Tell me stories of the past; bring me pictures from your scrapbook. Speak of love, not sorrow. Remember the life, not just the death. Give me hope, not meaningless words. Hug me, hold me, love me, leave me, but don’t shower me with words that are meant to soothe, but sear instead. Your presence really is the healing touch. No words need be spoken between friends and family when love is the weaver of the threads.

Words, Words, Words continued.

“He’s in a better place.” (I thought right next to me was a pretty good place) “At least you have other children.” (Yes, but I really loved that one, too.) “She’s better off now...not in any pain.” (She may be out of pain, but I’m not!) “Where’s your faith? You should be happy for him” (My faith may help my heart feel better, but it’s my arms that are empty and aching.) “God needed another flower in His garden.” (What about MY garden?!) “You can have another baby” (Maybe, but no one can replace someone) “You were so happy together. Be grateful for that.” (I am grateful, but I want more!) “At least he didn’t suffer.” (Yes, that’s true, but I am suffering now.) “She was so young. You didn’t really get to know her that well.” (Since when does age have anything to do with how much someone is loved?) “Time heals all things.” (Time does nothing except pass. It is what you do with the time that might change things.) “You’ll be better tomorrow.” (Perhaps, but what about today?) “You can’t stay sad the rest of your life.” (Oh yes I can) “Your loved one wouldn’t want you to be so sad.” (How do you know? I have told my loved ones that I expect at least three days of heavy grieving. After that, they can do

whatever they wish. But I do want them to be sad...at least a little bit!) “Be happy she’s healed now.” (That may be true, but it is still my heart that is broken...my arms that are empty. What about me?) “Why are you so sad?” (Oh, I don’t know... maybe it’s because someone I loved has died.) “We have gathered here to not to mourn the loss of... but rather to celebrate his life.” (The thought here is nice, but the timing seems a bit “off.” I am not quite ready to celebrate. I think I need some griev-ing time, too.)

Words. Just words. Let them fall to the wayside when you hear words that do not quite touch the pain or hit the mark. Realize that someone is trying to reach you, soothe you, comfort you. So what if their choice of words falls short of the goal or even brings a moment or two of pain? At least someone cares enough to keep trying! And the sounds of silence are even worse than the words that come wrapped in good intentions and tied with a silly looking bow. I’ll take your comfort any way you can share it with me. But maybe the best words to say are simply, “I’m here and I don’t have a clue as to how to help, but I’m here, and together we’ll figure this thing out.”

Reference:

<http://www.griefdigest.com/Mag-Apr-2005.pdf>

Walking the Path Toward Healthy Living with the Pain of Loss:

How can Grief Care and Support Help You?

Sometimes it hurts more as the weeks and months go on. Family and friends may hope and think that you will be “over it” in a few weeks or months.

Many of us expect complete healing with the passage of time.

But for you, there remains something missing—a vacancy, a longing, an emptiness.

How can St. Anthony’s Hospice Bereavement Care Services Help You Ease these Deep Feelings of Loss?

- Our grief counselors are available to you as a caring listener.
- We have resources and information available to help you understand what to expect as you mourn your loss.
- We can connect you with others to find out what is helpful while coping with grief.
- We can provide you with a safe place to express your feelings and thoughts, both individually and as part of our education and support offerings throughout the year.
- We can link you with other helpful resources in your community as you rebuild your life after loss.

How can You help Yourself during this Difficult Time?

- Use the help that is available to you.
- Share your thoughts and feelings to help you and others better understand what you are going through.
- Talk about your guilt, anger, and despair as a way to reduce the reign that these feelings may have on you.
- Think about memories of your lost one as a way to review the relationship that you shared.
- Talk about what is different in your life so that you can better understand the changes that you will face during this time.

**A St. Anthony’s Hospice Grief Counselor is available to you.
Please do not hesitate to call us.**

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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St. Anthony's Hospice

CELEBRATING THE JOURNEY