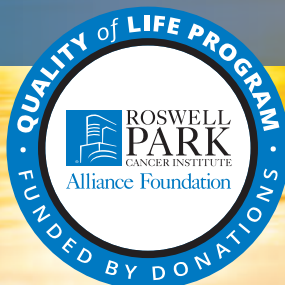




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Journey Through Grief

GRIEF RESOURCE BOOKLET FOR FAMILIES

Roswell Park Cancer Institute
The Department of Pastoral Care





*Grief is not a mountain to be climbed,
With the strong reaching the summit
Long before the weak.*

*Grief is not an athletic event,
With stopwatches timing our progress.
Grief is a walk through loss and pain
With no competition and no trials.*

Anonymous

THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE

*"No one cries very much unless something of real worth is lost.
So grieving is a celebration of the depth of the union."*

Dr. James Peterson

University of Southern California

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Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Someone you love very much has died. Pain and fear sweep over you like waves in the ocean. You feel that you cannot bear it one more day and ask yourself, "How will I survive?" Your life has changed and a part of you is gone. It is true that you will remember and grieve a little all the rest of your life.

We, at Roswell Park Cancer Institute, are dedicated to assisting family and friends of our patients who have died through this new journey called grief. The staff of the Department of Pastoral Care has compiled this booklet on grief to help you begin the journey and to discover the resources that are available to you. It is our hope that this booklet will bring you some peace and comfort during these difficult days.

On behalf of everyone at Roswell Park Cancer Institute, we would like to extend our sincerest sympathies to you and your family during this time.

BLESSED ARE THEY WHO MOURN.

Loss through death can be one of life's most difficult emotional challenges. Feelings range from extreme loneliness and lack of energy to anxious activity, confusion and various physical symptoms. Few of us know what to expect and what to do.

Grief is the intense emotion that seems to overcome life when a person's security system is shattered by an acute loss, usually associated with a death of someone important in his/her life. It is the loss of someone or something that gives meaning and purpose to life.

Grief often lasts longer than expected.

Grieving takes a considerable amount of energy.

Grief is the emptiness that comes when you eat alone after eating with another for years.

Grief is the silent, night life terror and sadness that comes a hundred times a day, when you start to speak to someone who is not there.

Grief is the helpless wishing that things were different, when you know they are not and know they will never be the same again.

Grief is a whole cluster of adjustments; apprehensions and uncertainties that make it difficult to reorganize and redirect the changes of life.

Grief is where you feel cheated. Hopes—dreams—plans have been crushed.

Grief usually involves secondary losses, relationships, financial status, activities, etc.

Grief is where you find yourself overwhelmed by questions and doubts; about yourself, about your future, about others, about God, church, faith.

Grief is where at times nothing can be said to heal the heart.

Grief is as unique as a fingerprint – as unique as a snowflake. No two people grieve alike.

Grief will change you, but you have some control over whether the changes are for better or worse. Grieving requires balancing immersion in our sorrow with moving on, reminiscing with planning the future, crying with laughter.

Grief is a process. Recovery is a choice!

COMMON RESPONSES TO GRIEF

"Mourn not just for the loss of what was but also for what will never be. And then gently, lovingly, let go." (Grief Therapy)

When we lose someone we cherish, we respond emotionally, psychologically and physically.

Any or all of these responses may be considered normal and healthy under the circumstances. Not everyone experiences all of them. Some people have other responses not listed here. And often, reactions that have come and gone will return later in the grieving process. However, recognizing the emotions and working with the emotions are the keys to recovery.

EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

- Shock
 - Denial
 - Disbelief/Numbness
 - Guilt and Self-blame
 - Fear
 - Feelings of Loss/Loneliness
 - Emptiness
 - Sadness and Depression
 - Other reactions you have had _____
- Disorganization
 - Panic
 - Relief
 - Powerlessness
 - Anger/Rage
 - Hopelessness
 - Shame

PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSES

- Inability to Concentrate
- Explosive Emotions
- Low Self-Esteem
- Other reactions you have had _____
- Lack of Interest in Self or Others
- Prolonged Withdrawal
- Inability to Experience Pleasure

PHYSICAL RESPONSES

- Tiredness/Lack of Energy
- Difficulty Sleeping or Prolonged Sleeping
- Excessive Appetite or Lack of Appetite
- Tightness in Chest
- Shortness of Breath
- Loss of Muscular Strength
- Other reactions you have had _____
- Ulcers
- Heart Problems
- Stomach Pain
- Lump in Throat
- General Nervousness
- Headaches

If any of the above responses lasts for a period of time, you may need help from a health care provider. Don't be afraid to seek help.

SIX PATTERNS OF GRIEF

"The pattern of your grief is unique, shaped by your particular relationship, specific circumstances, and distinctive temperament."
(Grief Therapy)

The work of grief cannot be hurried. It takes a great deal of time and energy. The death of a loved one is considered the most stressful of all life change situations.

The following are patterns of grief that are commonly experienced after the loss of a loved one. You may not experience all of these, and you may not experience them in this order. Also, you may experience the same feeling over again. It is important for you to realize, however, that what you are feeling is natural, and with time, will begin to heal.

1. SHOCK AND NUMBNESS

In the beginning, shock and numbness are necessary and welcome. The mind will accept only what it is capable of handling. It protects us until we're able to cope with the deeper feelings of loss. When we're in shock, our systems and emotions tend to shut down. Also, this may be a time when we experience disorganization. Disorganization can be described as a time of confusion, where you may feel out of touch with the ordinary proceedings of life, break from your daily routine, become more forgetful or lose focus with the task at hand.

2. ANGER

Anger and resentment are normal phases of grief – feelings of helplessness, frustration and hurt. Anger could be at anyone: God, doctors, hospitals, families, friends or even at our loved one who has died. You may catch yourself responding with a great deal of anger to situations that previously would not have bothered you at all.

However, it is important that you understand what you are really angry at, the loss of someone you loved.

3. GUILT

There is usually some sense of guilt in grief. None of us can live close to or love deeply without hurting that person. We all do and say things we later regret. When a loved has died, we are reminded of these hurts and failings (real or imagined), and wish we could make up for these past mistakes. We consider all the "if onlys". This is part of life and doesn't warrant your guilt. These feelings of guilt are normal and should pass in time.

4. PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL DISTRESS – DEPRESSION

We expect grief to effect us emotionally, but it also effects us physically. The most common physical distresses include sleeplessness; tightness in the throat; a need for sighing; an empty, hollow feeling in the stomach; lack of muscular strength; and poor appetite. Closely related to the physical distresses are emotional alterations. The most common are: feelings of emotional distance - that no one really cares or understands; feelings of panic or being out of control. You may also feel the desire to run away.

Many bereaved feel total despair and hopelessness; nothing seems worthwhile. These feelings may be more intense for those who live alone or have little family. Depression can be the result of grief that is held inside, tears that go unshed, or feelings that are not expressed.

Depression needs to be recognized for what it is. It can wear many different masks. It can come disguised in bouts of insomnia, extreme fatigue, withdrawal from other people, loss of appetite, or a complete lack of interest in life. These feelings are normal and should also pass in time. A support group or professional counselor may help you with your feelings of depression.

5. LOSS, LONELINESS, WITHDRAWAL

When we lose a loved one, our world tends to get smaller. Problems that were manageable when shared with someone become magnified when faced alone. Also, those who grieve tend to withdraw and isolate themselves from social relationships and all activities. Most likely, their usual daily routines are disrupted. Life seems like a bad dream.

This is normal and will take effort to overcome, but the reward will be worthwhile.

6. ACCEPTANCE & REORGANIZATION

Acceptance does not mean loving less or no longer missing your

loved one. It means that you will let go and look ahead to your own life with a sense of well being and renewed hope. As you begin to move on, you may experience a sense of release and have renewed energy.

You will be able to make decisions easier and eating and sleeping habits will be re-established. You will find that you are able to laugh again and begin planning for the future.

FOUR TASKS OF MOURNING

In some ways, you never get over a significant loss. It inevitably changes you. You can choose whether that change is for the better." (Grief Therapy)

Task 1.

To accept the reality of the loss.

Task 2.

To experience the pain of grief.

Task 3.

To adjust to the environment in which the deceased is missing.

Task 4.

To withdraw emotional energy and reinvest in another relationship.

COMPLICATED GRIEF

"What might otherwise seem abnormal in your life at some other time is normal in grief."

People who have extreme trouble working through grief may have complicated grief. It is important to get extra help from grief professionals if you think you may have complicated grief.

COMPLICATED GRIEF...results when the grieving process is blocked. There are a wide range of normal ways to move through grief. But in complicated grief, a person becomes stuck in some part of the process. Complicated grief can lead to other serious problems: depressions, anxiety, sleep problems, physical illness, alcohol and other drug problems.

Some forms of complicated grief may include:

Absent, delayed or inhibited grief:

the person does not show any feelings of grief for at least two weeks after the loss or the feelings are muted.

DISTORTED GRIEF

One or more grief reactions become very exaggerated. For example, the person may only be able to feel and show anger. The anger blocks out other feelings, such as sadness.

CHRONIC GRIEF

The person never accepts the loss. He/She may stay stunned or preoccupied with the loss for months or years. Or the person may be "frozen" in time – for example never canceling subscriptions or keeping the loved one's room exactly as it was before the death.

Some factors that can put a person at risk for complicated grief:

The Circumstances of the Death:

- The death was sudden
- The death followed a very lengthy illness
- You lost a child
- You feel that the death was preventable

OTHER FACTORS

- You had a difficult relationship with the person you lost.
- You have other major losses or stresses in your life.
- You have a history of unmanaged stress, depression or other mental health problems.
- You feel that you don't have the support you need.

Please Note:

Having a risk factor does not automatically mean you have a problem. It means you should be extra alert and get professional help if you have any questions about your healing process.

CHILDREN AND GRIEF

“Soft is the heart of a child. Embrace it.”

One of the most difficult tasks following the death of a loved one is to tell a child. Explaining the mystery of life and death to a child is a difficult task when we as adults find it difficult to understand. Also, this becomes a more difficult when the adults speaking to the child are in the depths of grief themselves.

In the beginning, a younger child often does not know what how to react or how they "should" feel. In earlier days, death was experienced naturally. The dying were often cared for at home and funerals were held in the homes. Today, children have less contact with death. As adults, we try to protect our children from pain and suffering. Adults may feel that children are not capable of coping with the death. They may try to protect them by leaving them out of discussions, planning and rituals that surround the death. This avoidance can lead to confusion, which may lead to anxiety on the child's part. They may be left on their own to seek answers to their questions at a time when they most need the help and reassurance of those around them.

All children will be affected in some way by a death in a family. Even the youngest child who cannot understand needs the consistent love of the adults in their life and continued security. Adults model attitudes toward death for the children. If they see sadness and grief expressed openly, they will have the freedom to do so. There can be tears because the loved one is missed.

SOME COMMON EXPRESSIONS OF CHILDREN'S GRIEF

The response of each adult and child to death is individual in nature. Some common observations include:

SHOCK

The child may not believe that the death really occurred and will act, as it did not. This may occur because the thought of the death is too overwhelming or that the child has not been given the opportunity to be involved in the death rituals.

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

Along with fear, the child may have various physical complaints – such as headache or stomachache, following the death.

ANGER

Being mostly concerned with his/her own needs the child may be angry with the person who died. “Why did he/she leave me?” Or, “Why didn't God make him/her better?”

GUILT

The child may think that he/she caused the death by having angry thoughts of the person who died or may feel responsible for not having been "better" in some way.

ANXIETY AND FEAR

The child may become anxious about who will take care of him/her now that the person has died. He/she may also fear that other important persons in his/her life may die. He/she may cling to his/her parents or another adult and reach out for assurance of their love.

REGRESSION

The child may revert to behaviors that he/she has outgrown such as bedwetting or thumb sucking.

SADNESS

The child may show a decrease in activity – being too quiet.

OTHER RESPONSES

Children may assume the mannerisms of the deceased person, especially if that person is a parent.

Children may idealize the deceased.

Children may begin to have problems at school.

If the death is not worked through, children may remain stuck at the age of development when the loss occurred.

SUGGESTIONS FOR HELPING THE GRIEVING CHILD

- Maintain usual routines as much as possible.
- Show affection, and assure the child that those who love him/her still do and that they will take care of him/her. Sit with the child.
- Encourage the child to ask questions and give honest simple answers. Answers that may not help include “Grandma is asleep” (may result in a child’s fear of sleep); “It is God’s will” (may result in an understanding that God took him because he/she was not good); “Daddy was sick and went to the hospital where he died” (may result in the fear of hospitals).
- Encourage the child to talk about his/her feelings and share how you are feeling. Their expression of feelings may be best done through pictures, writing, drawing, a song, physical exercise, hitting a punching bag, etc.
- Allow the child to express his/her caring about you.
- For older children, allow them to contribute to the family by assigning them a specific task to accomplish.

- Reassure the child about the cause of death and that it was not his/her fault.
- Explain rituals to him/her ahead of time and let him/her decide how he/she may want to participate. Remember to prepare the child in advance to what they may see, smell, etc.
- Encourage the child to create a memorial – plant a tree, donate a book, put a photo album together.
- All children who are grieving need to cry. Tears are a natural expression of the feelings that are a part of the grieving process.
- Tears can provide a release for the child.
- Be available and provide consistent presence, support and encouragement. Listen to where children are in their grief and respond to expressed needs.
- Learn all you can about children’s grief, so that your response is both appropriate and informed.

THE LOSS OF A PARENT

“Undertake new activities and create new rituals out of the past.”

For an adult the loss of a parent may have a much bigger impact than anticipated. We expect our parents to die before we do; however, when it happens, we are sometimes not prepared and may experience deep grief. Parents may have been the glue that held the family together for holidays and special family events. For some adults, their parents may have been the most significant people in their lives, and they now feel orphaned. But relationships with parents can be complex, and strong feelings of relief, anger, unfinished business and guilt may emerge. When a parent dies,

it is important to give yourself permission to grieve, to find others who understand, and to realize that your feelings, whatever they are – are normal.

THE LOSS OF A SPOUSE/SIGNIFICANT OTHER

“Make small beginnings toward reshaping your life without the one you love.”

We can expect that the grief reaction after the death of a spouse/significant other may be more difficult and last longer. In life commitment relationships, all elements of life are shared: physical, intellectual, emotional, social, economic and religious. Therefore there are many levels in which adjustment takes place. This will take time.

There is no way to prepare for the changes ahead. But with time you can find your way. Here are a few suggestions that may help you.

Accept your vulnerability.

There may be times when you find that you doubt yourself, because your loved one had always been your greatest supporter. You will find that a particular song, smell, sound or place may bring sudden waves of sadness and tears. Allow yourself to feel these things.

Take care of yourself.

Exercise as a regular part of your schedule to help find emotional release. Learn to take one day at a time. Sometimes you may need to take one minute at a time. Meeting grief on a daily basis is hard work and takes much energy. Therefore, there is only so much energy left to handle everything else. The priority has to be your well being.

Do not rush into any major decisions unless absolutely necessary. Selling your house to avoid painful memories, moving out of state, making large investments, or selling the car are examples of things you might be tempted to do, but decisions you might later regret.

Take your time.

Keep in mind it is healthy to let your children remember.

Your unwillingness to talk with them about the deceased parent may close the subject. Keep talking so they can share their feelings with you.

Maintain your routines.

Remember that you need to live your life and find ways to bring comfort to yourself. Be honest with others about what you want and don't want.

Begin to let go of the pain.

Death comes with many different feelings and emotions; loneliness, guilt, sadness and anger. Your relationship may feel unfinished or imperfect and sometimes you may feel abandoned by your spouse. Journaling is a useful tool to help you reflect on these issues.

Over time it is important to forgive yourself, as well as your spouse for being imperfect and to let go of the potentially crippling feelings of guilt or anger. If these feelings aren't dealt with, they can hold us back. You will be able to let go of these feelings over time.

Seek spiritual support.

Prayer may be difficult. If so, try being with others who are praying. By being in their midst, you will find yourself supported by their energy and faithfulness. Establish a daily quiet time for yourself. A time for reflection, a time to catch up with your own feelings. Journal your thoughts, feelings, dreams and worries. By putting them on paper, they can be more clearly acknowledged. You may find this helpful or you may sit quietly with a candle or soft music.

Find a way to enjoy life and be grateful again.

Having good friends to share your thoughts and feelings with can be very helpful. Over a period of time, having fun and learning to laugh again will become more natural. Be grateful for the things you and your spouse had together; your children, your home, etc. Develop a gratitude list in the midst of your loss, there are still things to be grateful for.

It might be that the sun is shining or that a family member or friend had called. Think of a few simple things that you can be grateful for today. It will help with the healing.

THE LOSS OF A CHILD

“When your parents die, you lose your past. When your spouse dies, you lose your present. When your child dies, you lose your future”.

It is said that the death of a child is the most painful and most difficult loss to experience. It presents parents with the need to undertake a profound journey to regain life, hope and, with a tremendous amount of effort, any sense of happiness. Children are indeed our future, and regardless of the age of the child, infant or adult, the feeling of opportunities lost and memories that will never be often appear insurmountable obstacles to healing. The feelings of loneliness and sadness that appear after the deaths of a parent or a spouse are often joined by the forces of disbelief, anger, regret, guilt, and, very often, despair. The questioning of all we hold “good and true” becomes part of our everyday existence. A child’s death introduces us to the unnatural order of things. There is no “right” way to grieve the loss of a child, nor is there a “wrong” way. The death of a child brings about the most individualized form of grief known, something that is difficult to comprehend yet even more difficult to share. Some parents tend to keep feelings inside, while others are able to express their grief easily and openly. Parents will often approach this journey in completely different ways, mothers and fathers together in grief but apart in approach.

So what can be done?

Be patient with yourself as the road to healing is long, and not without its painful twists and turns. Make no demands upon yourself, nor should you set any time frames for your recovery. Gauge yourself against where you can be at a given moment, not against some artificial, hopeful boundary set early in the grieving process. This journey has many ups and downs, and lasts far longer than society in general recognizes. Understand that guilt, real or imagined, is a normal part of grief.

It surfaces in thoughts and feelings of “if only.” Learn to resolve guilt by sharing your feelings with others, and learn to forgive yourself. Anger will often accompany guilt. It is another common reaction to loss. Anger also needs expression and sharing in a healthy and acceptable manner.

Understand quickly that crying is the most natural expression of grief. Be unashamed of your tears, for they represent emotions that need releasing. Take comfort from those who offer it, but ensure that those wanting to remain close will allow you the opportunities to cry.

When possible, avoid the use of drugs or alcohol in an attempt to conquer your grief. Medications may stop or delay the grieving process. Masking the symptoms will not make them go away. The work needed to conquer your grief after the death of your child will remain.

Be aware that only those decisions that absolutely need to be made, those involving funeral and burial, need to be made on any timetable. Avoid making major decisions that have no urgency, or agreeing that someone else should make those major decisions. If your wish is to leave the child’s room exactly as it was, then that is your decision. Avoid allowing yourself to be coerced into doing those things that cannot be undone.

Watch for the physical reactions to the death of a child. These may include loss of appetite or overeating, sleeplessness, and sexual difficulties. Parents may find that they have very little energy and cannot concentrate. A balanced diet, rest, and moderate exercise are especially important for the whole family at this time.

Surviving children are often referred to the forgotten grievers within a family. They have experienced this loss with you, and are experiencing many of the same emotions you are. Share your thoughts and tears with them. As painful as it might be, work to make them feel loved and included.

Understand that a “normal” life, life as you knew it when your child was alive, has disappeared. But realize that a new “normal” will take its place. The pain will lessen with time. Memories will become more important, and life can regain meaning and purpose. You will progress from knowing the count of hours since your child’s death to the number of days. You will move to expressing the time in weeks, and then in years. But as this takes place, memories of your previous life with your child will replace the constant thoughts of loss.

You will never forget your child died, but you will come to a point where you will also remember they lived!

HOLIDAYS AND GRIEF

“Anniversaries and holidays – times that used to mean joy and celebration – can be the toughest now. Observe them with care and simple ceremony to ease the pain.” (Grief Therapy)

In our lives, there are many holidays or “special days,” such as weddings, birthdays, graduations, wedding anniversaries and anniversaries of loss, to name a few. Holidays and other times can be especially hard. But with some planning, you can make these times less upsetting and give them new meaning.

Here are some examples that have been helpful to others when these days arrive:

Anticipation of the day...

is often far worse than reality. Be realistic. There will be pain, especially when there is an empty chair at the table. Don't try to block bad moments. Deal with them and then let go.

Plan ahead.

Grieving people often experience a lack of concentration. Make lists. Prioritize everything. Decide what is really important to you.

Change something – change tradition.

Everything has already changed so don't be afraid to change some traditions. Try something new. You can always go back if it doesn't feel right to you. But don't toss everything out. Keep some. You choose.

Balance solitude with sociability.

Limit social gatherings – choose the ones that feel right for you and for your energy. When you do attend, leave if you must.

Listen to yourself.

As you become aware of your needs, tell your family and friends.

Don't set your expectations too high.

If you wish things to be the same, you are going to be disappointed.

Don't take on too many responsibilities.

Find your way a little at a time.

Hold on to your purse and wallet.

You cannot spend grief away, though you might be tempted to try.

Try shopping on "good" days (or hours, or a few not-so-awful moments). Do what you can when you can. Smaller shops may be less overwhelming than shopping malls. Catalogues are also helpful.

Understand the heartaches as you unpack holiday decorations. Remember the memories. Remember that tears can be healing.

Find a creative outlet.

Write a memorial poem or a story about your loved one and share it. Contribute to or work with a group that your loved one supported.

Buy a gift for your loved one...

and give it away to someone who may not receive a gift. It is the giving, the exchange of love, that we miss the most. Where you share love, it grows.

Light a special candle –

not in memory of a death, but in celebration of a life and love shared.

Learn to look for the joy in the moment.

Learn to celebrate what you do have instead of making mental lists of what you are missing. Change the way you look at things.

Accept the help from the people in your life.

SURVIVING YOUR LOSS

“Remind yourself of your reasons for living. You have a future worth enduring for, and you deserve to find a renewed sense of purpose and pleasure in your life.” (Grief Therapy)

Grief is a process. Recovery is a choice.

People who are grieving experience the process of letting go. They need to leave a place that was familiar. They are confronted with the uncertainty of the future and the adjustment to a new life style. But there is also hope, freedom, and healing during this journey.

HERE ARE A FEW SUGGESTIONS TO LEAD YOU:

Take time to accept the death.

Facing and accepting the death remains a necessary condition for continuing our own lives. Often it is hard to realize that what happened has really happened and that life has changed. As the reality of the death sinks in, we ask why it happened. It is really not important that we find an answer to that question because the answer is rational and our hurt is emotional. What is important is that it did happen.

Take time to let go.

One of the most difficult human experiences is letting go. Letting go reminds us that we are not in control of life, and that we need to accept what we cannot control. Letting go means adjusting to a new reality in which the deceased is no longer present. Letting go occurs when we are able to endure and accept the feelings—anger, guilt, fear sadness, depression or whatever—that accompany death. Letting go occurs when we are able to tolerate the helplessness and the insecurity, when we are willing to face the fears, to wait, trust and to hope again.

Be good to yourself.

Emotional injury can take more time to heal than physical injury. During this bereavement time, we need to listen to our own needs and make an effort to help ourselves. Grief takes a lot of effort. Treat yourself with the same care you would offer to a good friend in the same situation. Most of us remember love your neighbor, but we tend to forget the rest, as you love yourself. Remember, grief is an intensely personal experience—we all grieve differently.

Ask for and Accept Help

Don't be afraid to ask for help from those close to you. Often times, your friends and family feel helpless; this can be an opportunity for them to do something useful for you, which may help them in their own grief process.

Lean into the Pain

Lean into the pain. It cannot be outrun. You cannot go over it, around it, or under it; you must go through it and feel the full force of the pain to survive. Be careful not to get stuck in a phase. Keep working on your grief. Set aside time each day to grieve. Don't throw yourself into your work or other activities so that you are left with no time for grieving.

Good Nutrition

It's important to realize that your body is undergoing a lot of stress from the demands of grief work. Even though you may not feel like eating, you need the energy provided by regular balanced, nutritious meals, to get the vitamins you need.

Sleep

People often have difficulty sleeping during a period of bereavement. It's important to get adequate rest. Go to bed earlier. If you have trouble falling asleep, read a book, walk the dog, watch TV and try to keep to a regular routine. Avoid alcohol, tobacco and caffeine in coffee, tea or colas. All of these upset sleep, even if you find them relaxing. Alcohol may make you feel tired, but it reduces the quality of sleep.

Physical Exercise

Moderate, regular exercise helps to relieve tension and elevate one's mood. Don't take on anything too strenuous, but rather, have a regular, planned activity, such as swimming, bike-riding or walking. These will help to loosen tense muscles and increase your sense of well being. Walking with a friend provides an opportunity to share feelings as well, and can be excellent therapy. The local health clubs have many excellent exercise programs for all ages and abilities.

Relaxation

Only you know what places, situations and/or people help you to relax. There are, however, some general guidelines that might be helpful.

When we're tense, our breathing becomes shallow. When a person is weighed down with strong and painful feelings, he or she often breathes improperly, depriving the brain of necessary oxygen. Taking slow, deep breaths is a good way to ease your tension and resume proper breathing. Place your hand on your diaphragm (just below the rib cage and above the stomach). Take a deep breath through your nose. As you inhale, you should feel your hand pushed outward. Exhale through your mouth. Repeat this exercise until your breathing is deep and regular.

The greatest healer and stress reliever will be the love of those around you. Allow them the privilege of helping through this. Spend time alone with God or in quiet contemplation. Your anger, fears and needs all will be welcome.

Gather Information

Get information about grief. Understand what's normal helps reduce the feeling of "craziness." Talk with others about how they handled their grief. Get information about your particular loss. Read books and watch videos about grief. Information provides options and a sense of control.

Write

Once thoughts are down on paper, they are not scary. They can be looked at more objectively. Even if a person is dead or will never actually read your letter, write good-byes, I never told you..., I needed..., Thank You for..., I'm sorry..., This is the reason that..., or keep a journal about your feelings or about coping.

Balance Being Alone and Being With Others

It is important to spend time alone in grief – to think, remember and feel. It is also important to be with others to get support. Deciding to spend time alone with your thoughts and feelings is not the same as hiding.

Establish Meaningful Rituals

Especially if your loss has been through death, it is important to find ways to remember the person who has died. Visits to the cemetery? A tree planted in their memory? A candle lit during special holidays or "anniversary" days? You honor the life and memory of those you loved when you decide on special ways of remembering.

Locate Outside Resources For Help

Ask around. Finds out who does a good job of listening to the kind of loss you have experienced. Find out what support groups are in your area or counselors who specialize in grief. Ask for help.

COPING AS A FAMILY

Communication is the key to coping as a family with grief. It's important to be together to talk, cry, rage or even sit together in silence. At the same time there should be respect for each member's way of handling his or her grief. Some family members will grieve actively, others openly and others a combination of the two styles. In many ways, each family member must grieve alone. Here are some suggestions to help with family grief.

- Continue to give attention and time to your family and surviving family members.
- Try to be sensitive to each other's feelings. Feelings are often difficult to verbalize. Listen to what is meant as well as what is said.
- Hugs, a hand on the arm or back give comfort and a sense of closeness.
- It may be helpful to set aside a time to be "alone together" as a family or even to hold a family meeting. Encourage, but don't pressure family members to talk and to express their grief in their own way. Be a good listener.
- Plan family projects or trips.
- Make a "family diary" in which each family member may contribute a writing or drawing. You may want to make a collage together.
- Be careful not to give each other the silent treatment. Make sure the person who has died continues to be part of the family conversations.

- Respect the life stages of the various family members; an adolescent might gravitate toward peers in coping with grief. Everyone has a unique way of grieving, which can at times be at cross-purposes among family members. Accept each person's method of coping.
- Discuss the loved one's former role in the family, which now necessitates changes in the family duties and new roles for the survivors in the family. Be careful not to expect a family member to replace or to be the same as the member who died (expecting the young boy whose father died to be "the man of the house" or a son whose sibling died to be like that sibling in schoolwork, sports, etc.). Discuss what will be missed and irreplaceable.
- If depression, withdrawal, grief or family problems are getting out of control, seek professional help.
- Recognize that birthdays, anniversaries and special occasions will be difficult for the family and for each member of the family. Discuss together how to observe these occasions. Should there be a variation on traditional celebrations?
- Do any family members have particular concerns or suggestions?
- Consult family members on the disposition of the deceased loved one's possessions, including their room. Take your time and tread carefully where these precious moments are concerned. If possible, put off making major decisions about moving, giving away possessions, etc.
- Studies show that a bereaved person's self-esteem can be extremely low. Survivors should work on their image of themselves and help each family member to think and feel good about themselves.
- Remember that it's difficult to help your family if you are falling apart. Working on your own grief will eventually enable you to help your family to cope with their grief.
- As a family or individual pray to your loved one who has died to help cope with grief.
- If you can learn to grieve as a family, hopefully, you will grow as a family.

"GRIEF IS NOT THE PROCESS OF FORGETTING, BUT RATHER OF REMEMBERING."

There's a verse on a sympathy card that reads:

"God gave us memories...so that we might have roses in December."

This is a beautiful thought, but sometimes when we hurt so deeply, we may be more in touch with the thorns on the roses than with the beauty of their blossoms.

You may have haunting memories of your loved one suffering, but these will fade with time. In the meantime, it is helpful and healing to look at pictures that stir pleasant memories, or turn your mind to memorable events you shared with your loved one.

Memories are personal.

Whether it's speaking the name of your loved one, holding a ceremony to honor his or her memory, or revisiting a favorite place or activity you shared, the key is to make and preserve connections.

No one can take our memories; we carry them with us. We can help preserve them by making a memory book, preserving flowers or cards, or keeping special possessions. These might be major items, or something small that was used every day. Our loved one never really leaves us, because their spirit and presence continue to influence our daily lives.

As with every step of the grief process, we each have our own unique way of remembering our loved one and our own timing for that stage when memories that used to bring tears now bring a smile. Each

member of a family will have different memories, or remember the person in a different way. None of these ways are right or wrong. Memories, like feelings, just are. Sharing these memories helps affirm the value of our loved one's life and helps us to heal.

Please remember that healing does not mean loving less and there will come a time when you do not think about them every day or for prolonged periods of time. When the pain does not consume you every day, this means that you have begun to let go; that you have come a long way in your grief. But you should not be surprised that as happy as your lives may become, the missing and longing linger and never quite end.

"THE BEST MEMORIAL WE CAN GIVE OUR LOVED ONE IS TO LIVE OUR LIVES FULLY."

REMEMBERING...

Remembering is such a special thing.

At first, you feel and remember only the grief, the loss, Like a throbbing dome of pain over every thought, every recollection.

Remembering is such a special thing.

After awhile, you try to remember only the nice feelings, the good times. You fight yourself if memory tries to bring to mind anything unpleasant. It feels wrong to think of something not perfect. You remember big events, great successes. She/he was the most wonderful person in the world.

Remembering is such a special thing.

It takes time before you manage to recall without discomfort That you were angry with him/her, or disappointed or bored with him/her. It takes even longer to realize that such less than glowing recollections Make no difference to the way you love him/her

Remembering is such a special thing. And then, your memory allows you to have the whole person with you, All your thoughts about him/her are comfortable and comforting.

Your dreams about him/her begin to include scenes from every day life. That is when memory lets him/her be with you again, completely and truly. It may sometimes hurt a little, bring small reminders of your early grief. But most of all it feels warm and tender and real.

Remembering is such a special thing!

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

The Compassionate Friends, Inc. (National Office)

P.O. Box 3696
Oak Brook IL 60522-3696
(630) 990-0010 (Phone)
(630) 990-0246

thecompassionatefriends.org

Catholic Cemeteries Programs

4000 Elmwood Ave.
Kenmore, NY 14217
(716) 873-6500
Variety of Programs

Mary & Ralph Wilson, Jr. Support Center

150 Bennett Rd.
Cheektowaga, NY 14225
(716) 836-6460
Variety of Programs

Helpers Along the Way

Millard Filmore Hospital Location
1540 Maple Rd.
Williamsville, NY 14221
(716) 568-3777

Baker Memorial United Methodist Church

345 Main Street
East Aurora, NY 14052
(716) 652-9549

Widows Grief Support Group YMCA of the Tonawandas

49 Tremont Street
North Tonawanda, NY 14150
(716) 692-5580

Niagara Falls Niagara Medical Center

621 10th Street
Niagara Falls, NY 14304
(716) 433-3780

Bereaved Parents of the USA

Mary & Ralph J. Wilson,
Jr. Support Center
150 Bennett RD.
Cheektowaga, NY 14225
(716) 675-3844

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*A butterfly lights besides us
Like a sunbeam.
And for a brief moment
Its glory and beauty
Belong to our world.
But then it flies on again.
And though we wish
It could have stayed,
We feel so lucky to have seen it.*

