

Being Prepared for Life's Certainties
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“Be Prepared”—most of us certainly appreciate the wisdom of this of Boy Scouts motto. In myriad ways, most of us strive to “be prepared” for any number of life’s challenges, small and large. We carry the spare tire in the trunk, budget our money, and involve ourselves in training or education to update or develop skills. We research options before major purchases, use travel guides to plan vacations and “study up” on how to be better parents, partners, and employees. We seek out information to inform healthcare decisions and retirement choices. We assess, predict and plan to assure that we are prepared for the future.

The greatest certainties of the human experience are said to be “death and taxes”. Knowing there is no escape from the IRS, we dutifully assure taxes are withheld, records are kept and time set aside for the paperwork necessary for the annual April 15 deadline. Even though we don’t like to think about it, we all know that death will eventually come into each of our lives. We will either be left or leave others behind in our own passing. Despite the predictability of death and its consequences, Americans have too often acted as if avoiding preparation will somehow forestall the inevitable

Despite our desire to avoid the inevitability of death, most of us do take some practical actions that acknowledge personal mortality. We ante up for life and other insurance policies to assure our loved ones are provided for. Because few of us want the government to decide how child custody, property and assets will be divided after death, most people recognize that a legally binding will is a necessity. More and more people are taking steps to assure that their end-of–life preferences are known and honored through the use of Advance Directives. Living Wills and Designated Power of Attorney for Healthcare are increasingly utilized to for decision-making when the individual can no longer speak for himself or herself. When life-threatening illness strikes, and curative efforts fail, more of us are choosing hospice care as a life-affirming alternative to futile treatment.

In other respects, however, we continue to bury our heads in the sand. Far too many people face loss and grief without information or experience that could minimize unnecessary suffering. Although hundreds of books and thousands of articles have been written about grief, too often the information contained within these materials is usually accessed only *after* a loss. No one would think it wise to delay childbirth education until after the onset of labor. Even though information doesn’t eliminate pain from the birthing process, suffering caused by fear, anxiety and lack of information is greatly reduced. Yet we routinely avoid acquiring readily available information about bereavement and grief that could minimize unrealistic expectations, help us make sense of our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual reactions, and otherwise ease the bereavement experience when loss strikes-as it certainly will.

Learning about grief in advance of experiencing it will prepare you for what can be an exhausting, painful and confusing experience. The best time to learn about grief is now, regardless of whether you are actively grieving or not. In addition to better preparing you for your own inevitable loss experience, your new understanding may also help you better provide meaningful and sensitive support to grieving friends and family. Pick up the book, read the article, seek out information. The staff at *Pathways of Hope* can direct you to resources and materials about grief or Advance Directives that will help you to “Be Prepared.”