

GRIEF NOTES

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As much as we love the warm, sunny days of summer, all of us realize that without the occasional shower, rainy day, or earth-soaking thunderstorm, the lush greens and riotous colors of the Ohio summer would soon disappear. “Dry spells” find us searching the skies for heavy clouds that hold hope for a much needed downpour. The oppressive atmosphere that precedes the storm is soon replaced by the clear skies and crisp, fresh air that emerge when the storm has run its course. Despite the annoyance associated with disrupted plans, we recognize that the temporary inconvenience of a summer storm is the necessary price to pay for beautiful blossoms and bountiful harvests. Without the rains that nurture the fields and forests and fill our rivers and lakes, life would not be sustainable.



Just as the summer rains are essential to our health and well being, there is growing evidence that human tears are likewise essential to personal health and well-being. Scientists who study human tears have discovered that tears are much more complex than might appear at first glance; so complex in fact, that they have identified three distinct types of human tears. Basal tears and reflex tears serve to nourish and protect the eye from irritants and bacteria and viruses. Emotional tears, the tears that can at times seem so

“Heavy hearts, like heavy clouds in the sky, are best relieved by the letting of a little water.”

Antoine Rivarol

troublesome to grieving people, are the type of tears that are shed in response to sadness, distress or physical pain. Their chemical composition is markedly different from that of the basal and reflex tears and appear to have a function other than the protection of the eye itself.

It seems that these emotional tears pack a pretty powerful punch, ridding the body of stress induced chemicals that can be toxic to health if not flushed from the body. We know that the stress of grief can have a negative impact on our ability to fight off infection. It

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seems that shedding some tears also helps us shed stress induced hormones, thus protecting health in the long run. Some writers have likened tears to the body's pressure valve, allowing the body to restore itself to a healthy equilibrium.

Research into the "chemistry of crying" has likewise shown that, in addition to relieving stress by providing an outlet for painful feelings, a "good cry" can actually elevate your mood, making you feel better.

Whatever their form, be it a brief "shower" or a "thunderstorm" of

emotional release, the tears of grief are an expected part of the grieving process. Giving yourself permission to experience the healing properties of emotional tears will do much to ease your grief journey.

AMBUSHED BY GRIEF

Do you ever feel like grief just wells up and hits you unexpectedly? You may be having a "good" day and something is said, a song is heard, a memory is rekindled and all of a sudden the grief just washes over you. These sudden grief attacks are so common they even have a name.

A STUG reaction is a **sudden, temporary, upsurge of grief** that is usually triggered by events, experiences or thoughts that remind

us of our loss. Some have likened them to "waves" of grief that may unexpectedly knock us off balance. One writer has even suggested that we think of these experiences as "Grief Hugs" because they serve to remind us that love and memories of our loved one continue to be carried within our hearts.

Common triggers are favorite songs, special days such as birthdays, anniversaries and holidays, movies or TV programs that touch our emotions, a change in seasons or events or milestones where the absence of a loved one is keenly felt. These STUG reactions are a normal part of the grief

experience. While STUGs tend to greatly lessen over time, they never completely disappear. The key is to remember that for all its suddenness, the grief surge is a temporary experience. It quickly washes over us, and will soon wash away. At first these experiences may feel fairly destabilizing, leading us to wonder if we are really making any progress. With time and experience, we become more adept at regaining equilibrium and recognizing STUGS for what they are — reminders of love and loss.



"If ever there is a tomorrow when we're not together...there is something you must remember. You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think. But the most important thing is, even if we're apart... I'll always be with you."

A. A. Milne

WHEN GRIEF ENTERS THE LIFE OF A TEENAGER

JONATHAN HAAG, LISW-S, ATR-BC

Each year thousands of teenagers in the United States experience the death of someone they love. When a parent, sibling, friend or relative dies, teens feel the painful loss of someone who helped shape his or her self-concept. Unless the feelings of grief are processed, these feelings about the death can become a part of their lives for years.

ADOLESCENCE CAN BE NATURALLY DIFFICULT

Teens are no longer children and they are not yet adults. Other than infancy, no developmental period has more tumultuous change than adolescence. Leaving the stability of childhood, the adolescent begins the process of moving away from parents and forming a new sense of autonomy. The death of a loved one, then, can be a particularly overwhelming experience during this already complicated and challenging period.

SIGNS A TEEN MAY NEED EXTRA HELP

Because grief can be particularly difficult during the teenage years, it is helpful to know what behaviors may signal that a teen is struggling with grief. Most teens do not have a large number of symptoms, but usually have some. Below are some grief symptoms to be aware of:

- **EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES:** chronic depression, deep sadness, consistent irritability, restlessness and low self esteem
- **PHYSICAL CHALLENGES:** Sleeping difficulties or over sleeping, eating too much or not at all, fatigue, stomach and headaches as well as other somatic complaints.



- **SOCIAL CHALLENGES:**

Changes in relationships with family and friends, wanting to be alone all the time, risk-taking behaviors such as drug and alcohol abuse, fighting, and sexual experimentation or promiscuity, denying pain while at the same time acting overly strong or mature.

- **COGNITIVE AND SCHOOL**

CHALLENGES: Lack of concentration, declining grades, academic failure or indifference to school-related or social activities, or over-activity and acting too busy in an effort to block out the pain.

- **SPIRITUAL CHALLENGES:** Anger with God, concerns regarding the afterlife, and questioning or loss of a belief system, struggling with feelings of forgiveness and guilt.

CARING ADULT'S ROLE

How adults respond when a death of a loved one occurs can have a tremendous impact on the way a teen processes grief. At times adults may struggle themselves with the death of a loved one and avoid talking about the death, believing that by doing so teens will be spared some of the pain and sadness. Adults who may be avoiding their own grief may discourage teens from sharing their grief.

Bereaved teens often feel pressured to act as they are doing better than they really are. One way this can happen is when a parent dies, many teens are told by well meaning family members to “be strong” and to “carry on” for the surviving parent. The teen may be working very hard to cope with his or her own circumstances let alone the additional responsibility of supporting someone else. Obviously, this kind of

situation complicates the teen’s “grief work.”

Teens often need caring adults to affirm that it is natural and healthy to feel sad as well as any number of different feelings after a loved one dies. Teens benefit from gentle reminders that the pain they feel right now will not go on forever, but will slowly heal as they express their feelings of grief. When teens receive the message “ignore your grief”, they may suffer more from feeling isolated and alone in their grief than from the actual death itself.

WHAT HELPS

Teens that are having a particularly hard time with grief may benefit from one or more of the many resources available in most communities. School counselors, clergy, and private therapists are appropriate resources. Peer grief support groups are one of the best ways to support grieving teens as they naturally look to their peers for affirmation of their feelings and experiences. At Pathways of Hope, teens can find support through one-on-one grief counseling, art therapy, family grief counseling, school-based grief support groups, and group experiences such as Camp Pathways and the Pathways Breakaway mini-camps.

COPING WITH THE DEATH OF A PARENT

The loss of a parent is the most widely experienced type of bereavement, affecting millions of adults every year. Unfortunately, the grief experienced by bereaved adult children frequently goes unrecognized by others. When the death of one parent leaves the surviving parent newly widowed, the grief of the adult child is often overlooked in concerned inquiries about how the surviving parent is doing.

Whether the parent-child relationship was experienced as nurturing and supportive, or challenging and complicated, the void that remains after the death of a parent can be deep and wide. Although the eventual death of one's mother and father is an expected part of the natural order of life, it is a mistake to assume that age and experience will necessarily protect the adult "child" from the pain of grief.

When the relationship with a parent was known to be strained, distant or otherwise troubled, friends and family may not know what to say or may assume that the parent's death has somehow "solved" the difficulties posed in the parent-child relationship. When the last remaining parent dies, the intensity of the feeling of being "orphaned" in mid-life takes many

adults by surprise.

Regardless of whether the death was expected or sudden, the grief that follows may be more intense, confusing and enduring than one expects. Questions about what is "normal" rise to the surface as siblings and other family members react to the death in differing ways. Issues and interests related to the restructuring or loss of the family of origin, reassignment of family responsibilities, and the stresses associated with settling of the estate too often compound the pain and isolation of grief.

Pathways of Hope offers two support groups designed specifically to provide bereaved adults a safe place to explore common concerns, share memories and coping strategies, and gain a better understanding of the experience of grief associated with losing one's mother or father. The **Memories of MOM** and **Fatherless Child** support groups are held throughout the year and meet for four consecutive weeks. Preregistration and commitment to attend all four sessions is required; information about upcoming groups can be found in the center insert.

SAVE THE DATE FOR OUR ANNUAL REMEMBRANCE WALK!

It isn't too early to start planning for the annual Hospice of Dayton 5-K Remembrance Walk, which provides families and friends an opportunity to walk in memory of loved ones. This year's walk will be held on Saturday, November 3, so mark your calendar and plan to join us for what we hope will be the biggest gathering yet. Opportunities to form a team are available; for further information and registration materials, please contact Amanda Burks at (937) 258-5537.



GRIEF COUNSELING SERVICES COME TO WRIGHT DUNBAR



Pathways of Hope grief counseling services are now available in our new beautiful offices in the historic Wright Dunbar preservation district. The 1137 West Third Street location is conveniently accessible from I-75 and Hospice of Dayton shares the building with the Wright-Pat Credit Union. The Wright Dunbar office offers individual bereavement counseling as well as **Life After Loss**, a general grief support group. Participation is open to the public, and not limited to a specific type of loss. Services are provided without charge and without regard to prior use of Hospice of Dayton services.

Check our center insert for details on meeting days and times.

NOTES ON MUSIC: MUSIC AND TRANSITIONS

TERESA EDINGFIELD, MSA, MT-BC, MUSIC THERAPIST

Transitions in music are segments of music that carry the listener from one section of music to another. They are most needed when two sections which are completely different are brought together in a flowing manner. If the transition is not designed well, the listener may be left wondering what's going to happen next. Done well, the transition creates a sense of completion of what was and an expectation of that to come.

Compare this to experiencing the loss of a loved one. The life before the loss is completely different from the life after the loss. What happens during the transitional phase is inherently

rocky and full of unknowns. What can be done to ease that transitional period? Back to the music!

Music can be used as a transition...

When you feel like you can't go any farther. Listen to a few minutes of music of your choice to get through a rough spot. Perhaps it's low energy, or no motivation to get something done that is causing a problem. Set your goal low enough to achieve, then build on it as you are able.

When you need a good release. Finding a song that will help empty out the suppressed emotions can be cleansing. Those emotions may be

sadness, anger or loneliness. There is a song for nearly everything. Lyrics may not be necessary. Find something that meets your need.

In a moment of needed refreshment. Soothing music and deep breaths can work wonders to clear the mind and refresh.

To refill the spiritual well. Choose music that reminds you of your spiritual framework.

Remember that transitions are a segment of time. Grief can be overwhelming. Take it a piece at a time and use a few minutes of music to get to the next moment.

THE HOUSE IS SO EMPTY NOW

DEBBIE HOLT, MS, PCC-S

Learning to live alone is one of the most challenging aspects of life after loss. Whether it is coming home to an empty house, facing the quiet evening hours on our own, or learning to sleep alone, the adjustment is often difficult and painful. The home we have shared too often feels like an empty and unwelcoming house, filled with memories that remind us only too vividly of our loss. Sometimes, very small changes in our behavior or environment can help make the transition to a new normal more manageable. You may want to consider some of the following strategies that others have found to be helpful.

- Turn the radio or TV on before you leave the house so that you do not return to a silent house.
- Put painful reminders in a safe place or in a special area of the house where you can access them intentionally.

- Adopt a pet — many have found that caring for a companion animal has deep rewards at many levels.
- Ask friends and family to call in the evenings.
- Move the TV to a different spot; changing the view sometimes helps.
- Some people find it helpful to create a “sacred space” where they can choose to be alone with their thoughts and memories and mementos such as photos or other meaningful mementos.
- Sleep on the other side of the bed or sleep with a full length “body pillow.”
- Experiment with different scented candles or room scents to make it feel more homelike.
- Change your routine. Tape evening TV shows and watch them during the day; answer emails and correspondence in the evening; and take care of chores later in the day.



- Take your walk in the evening.
- Rent videos that you and your partner never would have enjoyed together.
- Use a loved one's t-shirt as a pillow case for your bed pillow.
- Join a support group and make plans with new acquaintances. You are sure to meet someone else who would enjoy sharing a meal, movie, concert or walk.

AM I LOSING MY MIND?

"I'm not sure what is wrong with me... I can't seem to remember anything since my loved one died"—grief counselors hear this complaint on a regular basis from bereaved people. While most bereaved people expect the sadness and emotional impacts of grief, few are prepared for the forgetfulness, distraction, concentration difficulties and the memory problems that are often part of the grief experience.

Grief is both physically and mentally exhausting. It is experienced and expressed not only in our feelings, but also in our thoughts and in our behaviors. Because thoughts and

feelings are so closely connected, we should not be surprised that grief takes a toll on us mentally. Adjusting to the challenges of life after loss can be compared to learning a new language. Just as none of us would expect to become fluent in a foreign language in a matter of weeks, our brains do not seem to be wired to effortlessly accommodate the discrepancies that exist between the old life we once knew and realities of life after loss.

The confusion, concentration difficulties, and memory problems that are common among grieving people should naturally dissipate over time.

Distraction is a normal aspect of grief which interferes with our ability to stay focused on what we are doing, recall where we put things, or remember appointments and social obligations. Grieving people often complain that they feel like their brains are moving in slow motion as they struggle to answer questions or figure out something. These difficulties will usually abate as we make sense of our loss and become more fluent in the new "language" of our changed lives. In the event that these cognitive problems persist or continue to cause personal distress, talking with a physician or a bereavement counselor is suggested.

GRIEF SUPPORT SERVICES AVAILABLE IN BUTLER AND WARREN COUNTIES

BONNIE ORLINS, MSW, LISW-S

Family members who reside in Butler and Warren Counties and southern Montgomery County will be pleased to know that *Pathways of Hope* is expanding the availability of grief counseling services offered there. *Pathways of Hope* grief center at Hospice of Butler and Warren Counties is located in the Team and Staff Center, 5940 Long Meadow Dr., Franklin, Ohio 45005. The center is conveniently located off of the 1-75 Middletown exit and the nearby Atrium Medical Center. Professionally licensed staff provide confidential grief support through both individual counseling and group counseling in a private, tranquil setting. Services are available at no charge not only to those who have been involved with our hospice services, but also to any community members who may be dealing with grief associated with the death of a loved one or the losses associated with life-limiting illness.

For those who are interested in learning more about what to

expect when loss enters their life, Understanding the Grief Experience is a one-time, 90-minute educational program designed to provide information about the grief experience. This program is offered twice per month and is recommended for anyone who has already suffered a loss as well as anyone who is facing the loss of a loved one.

Walking Through Grief Widow/Widower support group is an ongoing support group which meets once a month. This group, which is always open to newcomers, offers widows and widowers support from others who have experienced similar losses.

The Life After Loss group offers support, understanding, encouragement, and practical suggestions for anyone who has lost a parent, sibling, significant other, friend or another close family member. This group meets once a month and is always open to new participants.

Pathways of Hope also offers other comprehensive services to the communities of Butler and Warren counties. Through our *Healing Pathways* programs, school-based grief support is available to children and teens. Working with school administrators, we provide grief support groups and individual grief counseling services in the school setting. If tragedy affects the school community, support and advice are also available for staff and students.

Speaking engagements on specific grief related topics are also available to community groups and organizations.

Detailed information about meeting times may be found in the center insert. To request further information or schedule an appointment, call (513) 422-0300 extension 5707 or (937) 258-4991.

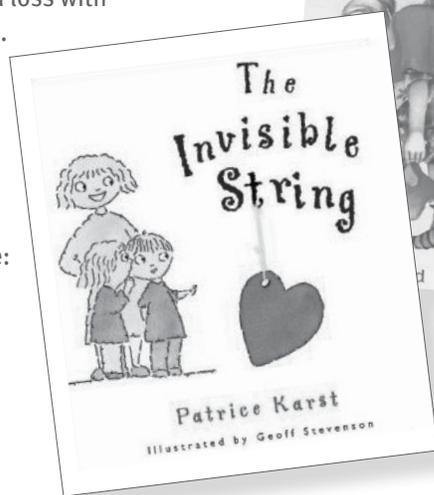
HOW DO I EXPLAIN TO A CHILD?

Helping a child understand and cope with death, grief and loss often leaves concerned adults feeling inadequate and unprepared. Engaging and age-appropriate books can open doors to meaningful conversations and provide opportunities for sharing and support that might be difficult to engineer through other means. Even though we don't like to think that childhood will be marked by painful loss, the experience is frequent enough that there are a number of children's books that address the issues associated with death, dying, grief and loss with sensitivity and compassion. Although written for children, adults are often surprised at how deeply the books touch their own grieving hearts!

Two of our favorites include:

THE INVISIBLE STRING by Patrice Karst. DeVorss & Company (2000).

Patrice Karst addresses separation issues in this charming illustrated book. She reassures children of all ages as well as adults that people who love each other are always connected by an invisible string made of love. Although you cannot see the string, you can feel it deep within your



heart. This book offers gentle comfort in knowing that the string provides an ongoing ever present connection that can reach anywhere and everywhere so that you are always connected to the ones you love.

THE VERY BEST OF FRIENDS by Margaret Wild with Illustrations by Julie Vivas. Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich (1989).

James and William the cat are the very best of friends, who live together on a farm with Jessie. The unexpected death of James takes its toll on both William and Jessie, with both reacting in ways that will seem familiar to anyone who has ever experienced grief. How Jessie and William learn to live with one another and find comfort with one another provides a gentle lesson in the importance of caring for one another.



GRIEF FAQs: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT GRIEF

Q: HOW LONG WILL MY GRIEF TAKE?

A: The short answer is that there is no timeline for grief – it takes as long as it takes. Unfortunately, most people underestimate the time and energy that adapting to all the changes precipitated by the loss of a loved one entails. Some losses, such as the loss of a spouse or a child, can leave huge voids in the fabric of day to day life and present ongoing and unexpected challenges for some time. How long

your grief takes depends on many factors specific to you and your loss, such as the nature of your relationship with the deceased, your temperament, personality and coping style, and the specific circumstances surrounding the death. Grief and mourning can be expected to fluctuate over time, at times lessening and at other times intensifying.

Q: I'M WONDERING IF IT IS OKAY TO STILL "TALK" TO MY LOVED ONE?

A: For many bereaved individuals, sharing thoughts and experiences by talking to a deceased loved one is a source of great comfort. After all, no one knows you in the same way as your loved one knew you, and no one

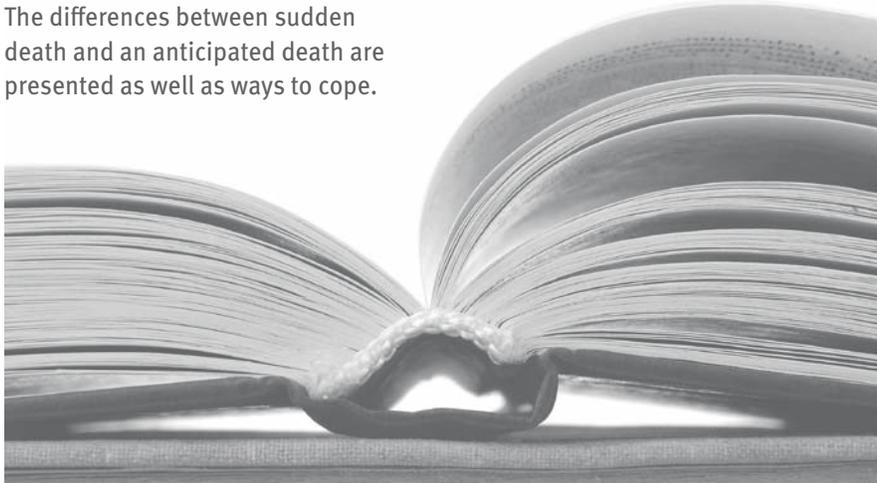
had the same relationship or shared the same conversations as you and your loved one shared. Some people report that they "talk" out loud to a favorite photo, or while they are visiting the graveside. Others report mental conversations. These one-way conversations with a deceased loved one can be helpful in many ways. Although we cannot expect a deceased loved one to hold up their end of the conversation, you may find that you can "hear" what your loved one's response would be if they were able to actually talk with you. These conversations with the deceased are but one of many ways in which we recognize that although death may end a life, it does not end a relationship.

THE GRIEVER'S BOOKSHELF

NO TIME FOR GOODBYES by Janice Harris Lord. Compassion Press (2006).

This book discusses the unique challenges facing individuals who have experienced sudden losses by suicide, homicide, and vehicular accidents. It also provides specific information to help guide survivors through the criminal justice system. The differences between sudden death and an anticipated death are presented as well as ways to cope.

Featured books may be purchased or ordered through your local bookseller or may be available at your public library.



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The *Pathways of Hope* Grief Counseling Center at Hospice of Dayton relies on the individual and community donors who so generously support the services we provide. Thanks to your generosity, all *Pathways of Hope* services are available without charge to serve the bereavement needs of anyone in the communities we serve. Donations to support our services are gratefully accepted through Hospice of Dayton Foundation, 324 Wilmington Avenue, Dayton, Ohio, 45420.



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