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BRIDGE

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Grief Notes

Coping with the discomforts of the summer heat wave is one of the more uncomfortable aspects of mid-summer. While hot days are part and parcel of the summer season, most of us have a limited tolerance for the sweltering heat and humidity of an extended heat wave. As temperatures shoot upwards, personal discomfort likewise soars. Pleasurable outdoor pursuits are stripped of their attraction when the mercury and humidity hovers in the upper ranges for days on end. Daily routines change, plans are adjusted, and awareness of personal discomfort increases as our energy is directed to seeking protection or relief from the oppressive heat. The heat itself can be debilitating to our sense of well-being, depleting energy as well as appetite. When the heat wave stretches beyond a few days, the heat, its impacts and our desire for a break in the weather increasingly occupy our thoughts and conversations. In the midst of the immediate misery, we seek hope and consolation in the knowledge that heat waves are temporary and “this too shall pass”.

When loss enters our lives, few of us are surprised to discover that the pain of grief follows. While we usually expect to feel sad and miss our loved one, we are often surprised to discover the extent of grief’s impact on our daily lives. As with a heat wave, our personal discomfort and distress is heightened as daily routines and once pleasurable pursuits trigger or intensify feelings of loss. Just as excessive heat dampens appetite and may disrupt sleep, so does grief. Sometimes it feels as though getting through the routine demands of the day takes all the energy we can muster. We find ourselves pre-occupied with intrusive memories, thoughts and questions which distract us from the other demands of daily life. Through accident or intention, we find some relief in conversations with others who share common experiences and concerns. In the distress and discomfort of the moment it is hard to find hope that the pain of grief will ever abate.

Life teaches us that summer heat waves are to be expected and that scorching temperatures will decrease in



time. The lessons of the summer heat wave can be applied to meeting the challenges of grief. Self care, seeking relief in safe, protective places, and sharing our experience and thoughts with others are helpful strategies for getting us through both a heat wave and through the pain of grief. Consolation and hope may be found in the knowledge that pain of acute grief is temporary, and like the heat waves of summer, will abate in time.

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The Pain of Multiple Losses

Brenda Wolfe, MS, PCC-S, NCC

Coping with the death of one loved one is difficult at best, but what can we expect when one loss follows another? The heavy and confusing burden of grief for individual people and significant relationships tax the emotional and spiritual resources we need to meet the challenges of day to day life.

The difficulty of processing concurrent multiple losses can leave us feeling guilty and overwhelmed. We may miss our elderly parent but the gut-wrenching loss of a child or spouse may overshadow that loss. The intensity of feeling which surrounds one loss may block or may significantly limit our ability to process other important losses.

Our grief is as individual as our relationships—not a “one size fits all” experience by any means. We readily recognize that the relationship with our child is not the same as our relationship with our spouse or our mother or our sibling or best friend. Each person we know and hold dear provides a special relationship that is irreplaceable in our life. Although we may recognize that we need to grieve each loss and each relationship individually, we are often challenged in our ability to mourn. Multiple losses teach us that although we can shoulder a heavier burden of grief than we could have ever imagined, there are limits to how much grief we can process at any given time.

Major loss typically leaves us feeling distracted, disorganized, unsettled, vulnerable and emotional. When multiple losses are involved, these feelings may be intensified, or even temporarily shut down. Grievers may struggle with conflicting feelings, increased sensitivity, and a need to re-establish some sense of control and predictability in their daily life. Grieving may be put “on hold” or the grief process may intensify or take longer as all the losses are sorted through. There are no hard and fast rules that apply to everyone- each person’s situation is different and everyone grieves in their own way.

Family, friends, co-workers, employers, or neighbors may not be able to comprehend the depth, intensity, or length of your grief process and so may believe that you are grieving abnormally. Remind those who question your process that each loss must be grieved in its own way and you are processing your grief as it needs to be done.

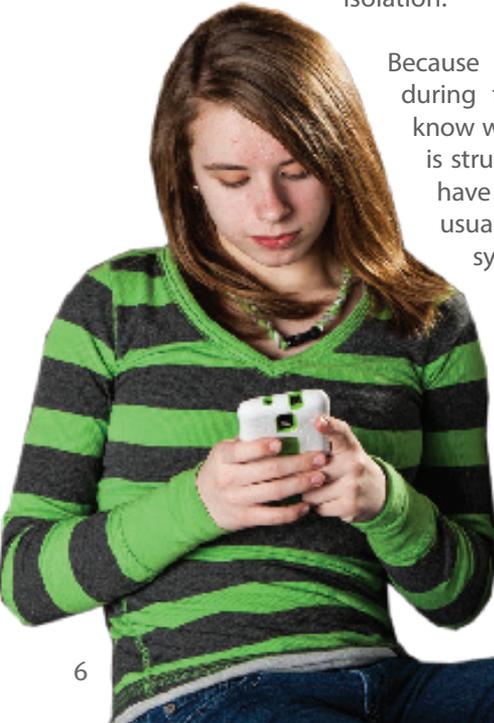
When a Teenager Grieves

Each year thousands of teenagers in the United States experience the death of someone they love. For many, that death may provide their first significant experience with the pain of grief. The death of a parent, sibling, friend, peer, mentor or relative who has helped shape the teen's self-concept can be particularly painful, especially when one is an adolescent with little prior experience with grief to guide them.

Grief can be a complicated process for teens due in large part to the natural difficulties of the transition from childhood to adulthood. Other than infancy, no developmental period has more tumultuous change than adolescence. No longer children and not yet adults, the adolescent begins the process of moving away from parents, challenging values formed in childhood and forming a new sense of autonomy. Friends who would normally provide support and affirmation, are often as inexperienced as they are with the challenges of grief, leaving the teen feeling isolated and alone. Teens may also try to hide their grief because they don't want to be seen as weak, vulnerable, or singled-out as being different. Seeking assistance and accepting support can be a complicated decision and may increase a teen's sense of confusion and isolation.

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 head aches as well as other somatic complaints.



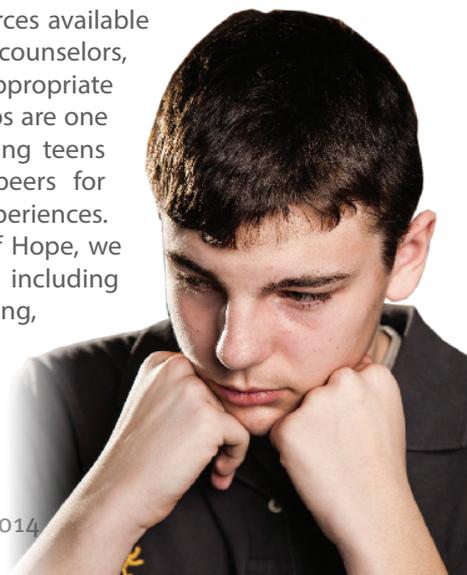
Social Challenges: Break down of relationships with family and friends, wanting to be alone all the time, risk-taking behaviors such as drug and alcohol abuse, fighting, and sexual experimentation or promiscuity, denying pain while at the same time acting overly strong or mature.

Cognitive and Academic Challenges: Lack of concentration, declining grades, academic failure or indifference to school-related or social activities, or over-activity & acting too busy (trying to block out the pain)

Spiritual Challenges: Anger with God, concerns regarding the afterlife, and questioning or loss of belief system, struggling with feelings of forgiveness and guilt.

How adults deal with their own grief can have a tremendous impact on how a teen processes grief. Misguided efforts to “protect” young people from the pain of loss by avoiding open discussion too often leave teens feeling isolated and alone. 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. Bereaved teens may likewise feel pressured to act as they are doing better than they really are. Messages about “being strong” and the need to “carry on” for others can add additional burdens to a teen’s effort to cope.

Teens that are having a particularly hard time with grief may benefit from 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 Hospice of Dayton’s Pathways of Hope, we offer a range of services for teens, including individual or family grief counseling, art therapy, school-based grief support groups, and our Breakaway and Camp Pathways programs.



Conquering Sleeplessness Starts Early in the Day

The normal exhaustion associated with grief is compounded when sleeplessness robs our body of the restorative benefits that a good night's sleep can provide. Problems associated with sleep are common among the recently bereaved. Surprisingly, researchers have discovered that a good night's sleep may be dependent on behaviors that take place long before its time to crawl under the covers.

- Wake up and get out of bed at the same time every day, even if you didn't sleep well the night before. Lying in bed disrupts your internal "sleep clock", contributing to sleep problems at the end of the day.
- Let the light in! Open the blinds and pull back the drapes. Get outside and exercise early in the day. Direct exposure to natural light will help regulate your "internal clock"; exercise can make it easier to fall asleep and will help you sleep more soundly. Just make sure you are finished exercising at least three hours before bedtime since strenuous exercise late in the day can interfere with sleep.
- Naps can be restorative, but the late day nap can also interfere with night-time sleep. If you must nap, short naps- 30-45 minutes- early in the afternoon are best. Avoid napping after five if you want to have a good night's sleep.



- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, spicy or sugary foods and nicotine 4-6 hours before bedtime. They all contain chemicals that can interfere with sleep if consumed too close to bedtime.
- Stick to a consistent and soothing pre- bedtime routine. Going to bed at the same time every night is one of the most important things you can do to reestablish healthy sleep patterns. A warm bath, light reading, warm milk, or light TV an hour or so before bed can get you ready for sleep.
- When it's time for bed, a cool, dark, and quiet bedroom with comfortable bedding should help you drift off. If you don't fall asleep within 15-20 minutes, get out of the bed and go to another room. Try reading quietly for 15 or 20 minutes and then go back to bed.

If you have persistent insomnia, a complete physical exam is probably a good idea since there could be a physical or medication-related factor causing sleeplessness. In some cases, your physician may prescribe medication temporarily to help you sleep.

Growing Through Grief Groups Provide Support & Education

The loss of a loved one can be a difficult, lonely and painful process, sometimes bringing about major changes in almost every life area. Our very popular Growing Through Grief support groups are designed to provide a safe, understanding and supportive environment for adults faced with the challenges of life after loss. The groups meet six times over a twelve week period, taking you through an entire season. An initial visit with a Pathways of Hope staff member will provide you an opportunity to work together to create a care plan that will help support you in the best ways possible. For details, please call Pathways of Hope at (937) 258-4991.



Don't Forget the Hospice of Dayton 5K Remembrance Walk

Saturday, November 1, 2014
324 Wilmington Ave.
Registration opens at 8:30 am
Walk starts at 10:00 am

Carl Nichols, retired Chief Meteorologist for WDTN Channel 2,
Grand Marshal and Walk Leader.

- Hospice of Dayton 3k.5k Remembrance Walk will start at Hospice of Dayton campus on Wilmington Ave., proceed through the neighborhood and lead back to Hospice campus
- The 3k is 1.86 miles. The 5k is 3.1 miles with the split at Nordale Ave and Revere Ave., and shuttle buses will be available to pick up walkers along the way.
- This course is wheelchair and stroller accessible.
- For the safety of all participants, no roller blades, bicycles or unleashed pets are allowed.

- Register before October 25, 2014 to receive event t-shirt. Bottled water will be provided for all.
- Parking is available offsite at various locations with shuttle buses.
- Awards for Top Team and Top Individual to be awarded before the walk.
- Make a difference; every dollar counts when collecting donations whether you are an individual or a team.

Hospice of Dayton is the region's only non-profit hospice. With your support, Hospice of Dayton can continue to do what is right for the patient without concern for profitability or shareholder return. We provided \$3,489,589 in unreimbursed programs and services to the community in 2013.

Register online at hospiceofdayton.org/walk or for more information contact Marsha Bernard at the Hospice of Dayton Foundation, 937-258-5537 or email mbernard@hospiceofdayton.org.

Grief FAQ's:

I frequently find myself at a loss for words when condolences and support are in order. Is there anything I might say that could be helpful at such a difficult time?

The most important things are to acknowledge the loss and express your concern and support. A simple "I am so sorry to hear of your mother's death" is a good starting point. Comments such as "I wish I had the words to comfort you" or "I'm not sure what to say, but I want you to know I care" communicate your awareness that you can't "fix" their grief and don't have "the answers". Offers of help should be specific. "Tell me how I can be of help" or "If it would be alright, I'd like to" are much more helpful offers than the commonly used "Call me if you need anything". Offering to watch children, care for pets, help with yard work, run an errand, provide a meal, provide transportation to an appointment or go to a movie together are but a few of the supportive gestures that can mean a lot to a grieving person. It might help you to know that often times, your willingness to be a good listener is far more helpful than anything you could possibly say.

Art Forever After: An Inter-generational Support Group

As one walks into the art studio space, there is a sense of wonder and expectation. What will we make today? Art Forever After, the new art-based grief group, provides the opportunity for individuals and family members to make art with others. This group is part of the Drawn Together program. The art activities are designed to enhance the expression of grief as well as well as to cherish the memories of the deceased loved one.

What is the format of the group? After group members arrive, introductions are made, a short passage about the grief process is read, the art activity(s) are explained, the group members make art, and the group closes by members sharing a little about what they made. Different art media used include scrapbooking, drawings, ceramic and painting projects.

One doesn't have to be "artistically gifted" to make art or benefit from this innovative group. As one adult participant recently commented "I'm no artist, but I really made some nice things."





Where: Join us at our new William and Dorothy Yeck Family Grief Counseling Art Center, 510 Wilmington Pike, adjacent to the Hospice of Dayton campus. Parking is available in the Hospice of Dayton lot bordering Wilmington, and the Center is accessible by stairs from the parking lot.

When: This group will meet for twelve consecutive Mondays, starting September 9, from 6:30-8:30 pm.

Who: Pathways of Hope's Board Certified Art Therapist, Jonathan Haag LISW-S, ATR-BC, will facilitate the group with the assistance of several trained Hospice of Dayton volunteers. This group is designed to be family friendly and multi-generational with ages 5 to 105 welcome.

Cost: There is no cost for this group.

Registration is required. Please call Pathways of Hope at 937-258-4991



When Grief Isn't Acknowledged

Bonnie Orlins, MSW, LISW

When someone suffers the loss of someone or something dear, the personal grief reaction can be overwhelming. In most circumstances, the bereaved will experience the support of others who will acknowledge the loss and validate their grief with offers of emotional and practical support.

What happens, though, when a griever's loss is not recognized or validated? The griever may suffer from "disenfranchised grief" which is a grief that is not openly acknowledged, socially accepted, or publicly mourned. Some possible examples include:

- Relationships that may not be viewed as grief "worthy", such as pet loss; or
- Losses that may not be equated with grief, such as loss of health or function or
- Relationships that may not be viewed as acceptable, such as extramarital affair

Those experiencing disenfranchised grief may be excluded from important events or milestones such as a ceremony or funeral. Because support is so often missing for disenfranchised losses, individuals struggling with their unacknowledged grief may experience complications with their grieving process. For example, the lack of a bereavement policy for their loss may preclude a griever from taking the time away from work needed to heal. Feeling anxious that others will make unkind judgments about them, their grief, or their relationship, and lacking social support, they may also feel guilty for feelings and for the manner and length of grieving.

Although personal grieving styles show wide variability, grievers can be disenfranchised when their style of grief

does not conform to the narrow expectations of others. For example, someone who grieves instrumentally by thinking and doing early in the grief process or intuitively by expressing strong emotions and feelings late into it may experience disenfranchised grief.

Unacknowledged grief can result in vulnerability, loneliness, unhealthy coping mechanisms like drug and alcohol indulgence, and long-term depression. If you are experiencing any loss, know that you have the right to grieve—and the right to have your loss recognized. One call to the bereavement professionals at Pathways of Hope can link you to confidential, nonjudgmental support.

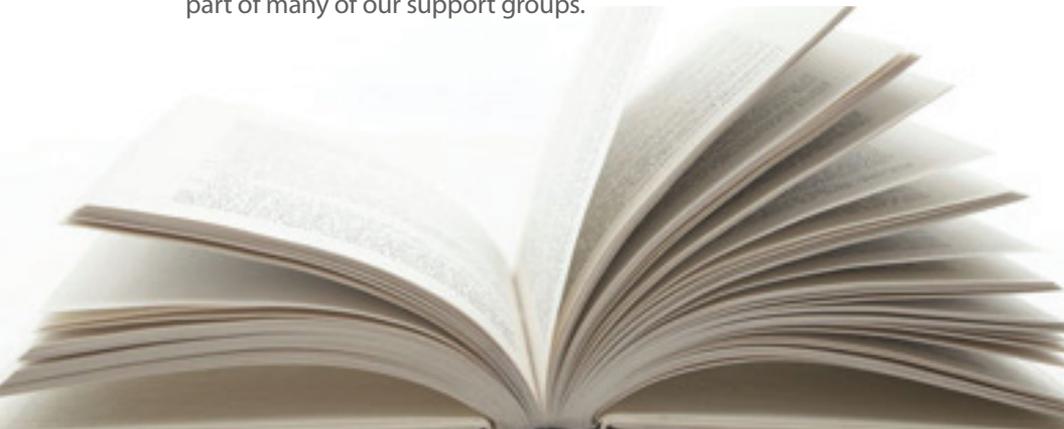
The Griever's Bookshelf

Title: *A Time to Grieve: Meditations for Healing After the Death of a Loved One*

Author: Carol Staudacher

Publisher: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994

This book is organized as series of short readings that speak to the personal concerns of grieving people. Covering a wide range of topics, it is not meant to be read in any particular order. The choice of a reading can be done at random or can be selected to match the reader's concerns or present challenge. The book's format and the comfort and wisdom offered within makes it a good choice no matter where one is in the grieving process. We like this book so well that it is the source for the reading that is a part of many of our support groups.





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