



# The Bridge

Bereavement newsletter published by Pathways of Hope  
Grief Counseling Center at Hospice of Dayton.

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Grief Notes	1
When Grief Comes to the Workplace	2
Notes on Music	3
Common Grief Myths	3
Coping With Holiday Grief	4
Hope for the Holidays	5
Remembrance Walk	5
Support Groups	6/7
Teen Retreat	8
Healing Pathways for Youth	8
Collateral Losses of a Grieving Child	9
Pathways Breakaway for Kids	9
Understanding Your Parent's Grief	10/11
Links to Back Issues	11
Griever's Bookshelf	12

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## Grief Notes...

By M. Bernadine Parks, MS, PCC-S  
Director, Pathways of Hope

The turning of the calendar page from August to September reminds us that the idyllic days of summer have, once again, passed all too quickly. Days shorten, and our awareness that the winter cold will all too soon be upon us serves to increase our appreciation of the beautiful days that remain. Maxwell Anderson, in the beautiful and melancholy American classic, *September Song*, reminds us that "when the autumn weather turns the leaves to flame, one hasn't got time for the waiting game". We take

the time for the evening stroll, the hike in the woods, the picnic or cookout, yard work or gardening, the local festival, the Sunday drive. We are only too aware that the warm and beautiful days that remain are, as *September Song* so aptly puts it, dwindling down to a precious few.



One of the lessons of loss relates to the preciousness of time itself. In the midst of grief, we long for the impossible—just one more hour, one more day with our deceased

loved one. If we could only time travel in reverse, and live again the time with our loved one! We would know just how precious our time together truly is and act accordingly.

Grief's preoccupation with who and what has been lost often blinds us to who and what remains right in front of us. In truth, none of us, grieving or not, have time for the "waiting game" when it comes to love and life. Each of us must choose how we will spend the "precious days" that remain to us. To give ourselves permission to be pulled into life's current, to turn our attention to those who remain with us, to experience joy and pleasure in the shadow of loss and sorrow, is a sign that we have learned the most important lessons of loss.



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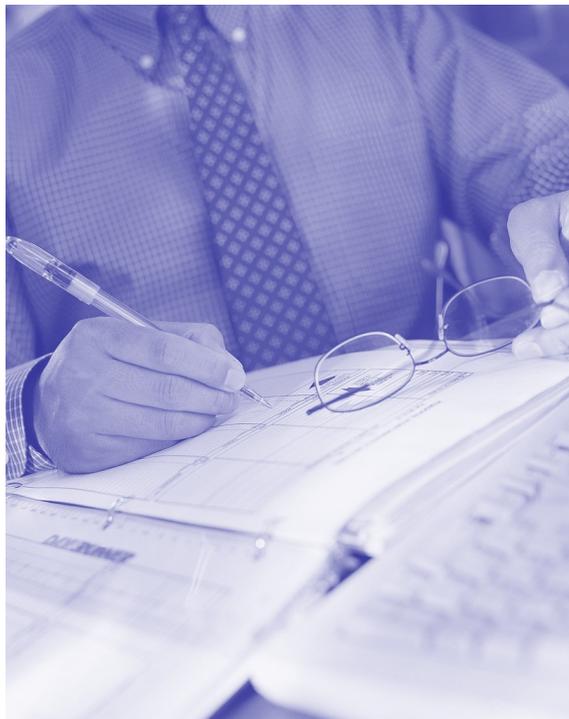
# When Grief Comes to the Workplace

Even though most working people spend more time on the job than with family or friends, we like to believe that the workplace should be unaffected by “personal” issues and concerns. This assumption is challenged when death casts its long shadow over the workplace. When a fellow employee is diagnosed with a life-threatening or terminal illness it becomes hard to keep the focus on business. At first, co-workers who are eager to provide support of any kind take on added work responsibilities; over time, the anxiety and worry for the colleague may be compounded by guilt and resentment over the ongoing disruptions to workflow. Legal obligations related to privacy may limit what can be shared with associates, leaving some questions and concerns unanswered.

Death may enter the workplace in a variety of guises- as the expected end of a terminal illness, through a sudden, unanticipated medical crisis or accident or through some type of violence.

Whatever the cause, the death of a co-worker can leave associates shaken and the workplace awash with grief. Associates struggle to gain understanding of what happened, and are often uncertain as to how to support families that may be known to them only through the deceased colleague. The empty space in a work group impacted by death is likely to be felt long after a replacement worker is hired. Work groups struggle with the challenge of “how to remember” while maintaining attention and focus on the “business at hand”.

When a colleague loses a spouse, a parent or a child, managers and co-workers are often uncertain as to how to provide meaningful but non-intrusive support. Upon returning to work, the bereaved worker may likewise struggle to “look normal” when their internal world is anything but normal. Just as the loss of a loved one impacts the functioning of individuals and families, businesses and organizations will feel the impact of grief on organizational functioning.



Being prepared for the inevitability of workplace grief can go a long way toward minimizing the disruptive aspects of grief. Having workplace procedures in place that address communication issues related to information about health status, family needs or requests, hospital or home visitation, details related to the death and funeral arrangements can minimize the negative impacts of the “grapevine. Communication needs to include external business associates who may have had a close business relationship with the deceased. A statement from top

management acknowledging regret over the loss of an employee is important for the employee’s co-workers as well as for surviving family members. Identifying someone to coordinate support efforts, such as meal delivery, transportation, monetary donations will minimize unnecessary duplication of effort. When managers know what to expect and how to respond, employees feel validated and supported. In turn, they are able to effectively support one another in the grief process while moving forward with the business at hand.

# Notes on Music: Staying Connected to Yourself

By Caitlin Nichols, MS, MT-BC  
Music Therapist

I am reminded daily of the important role music plays in our everyday lives. Being a music therapist allows me opportunities to connect with people through music on a daily basis. Patients and families tell me stories as they relate to songs we sing, and music prompts memories that might otherwise be lost. Music creates an environment that allows people to connect in difficult times, and I have seen families grow closer despite saddening circumstances.

Yet somehow, despite these daily reminders, I found myself not fully engaged musically in my own life.

It was not until I was given the opportunity to sing in a venue outside of my work with hospice that I realized I had been neglecting this very important piece of myself. As I started to gear up for this event, I became increasingly more energized. Finally – something for *me*.

It was through this experience that I became aware of how crucial it is for my personal mental health and overall well-being to stay connected to music. For me, music cannot just be *what I do* because it is part of *who I am*.

So now I ask you: what is it that helps you stay connected to who

you are? To others? To the world? I hope to spend more time writing music or learning songs I like. For others, it may be other forms of creative expression – art, dance, poetry, writing. For some, it may be finding time to spend outdoors with nature. It can be as simple as taking a quiet moment to yourself while enjoying your morning cup of coffee or taking time to remember the things that bring you joy throughout your day. Sometimes the most amazing things happen when we least expect them. We just have to be ready to notice.

## Common Grief Myths

By Debbie Holt, MS, PCC-S  
Bereavement Counseling

Myths surrounding the grief process often lead to increased feelings of guilt and pain for the grieving. The following are a few of the more common misconceptions, along with corrected thoughts.

**“It only takes a few months to get over your grief.”** While it is true most people find the heaviness of intense grief subsiding over time, the grieving process is much lengthier than most people expect. Everyone is different, but the formation of a “new normal” in life usually takes several years. Be careful of your own and others expectations of a quick resolution of grief symptoms.

**“All bereaved people grieve in the same way.”** While it is true most grieving people experience common grief symptoms such as sadness, longing, and fatigue, there is not one universal grief experience. Some griever will find comfort from visiting the cemetery; others will find the cemetery to be a painful place. Some griever will find comfort in holding on to loved ones clothes or possessions for a long period of time while others will find it helpful to sort through possessions immediately. Some griever will be very private in their grief expressions while others will want

to share their pain publicly. Expecting yourself to grieve in a specifically prescribed pattern will bring added stress to your grief process.

**“When grief is resolved, it never comes up again.”** Grieving is a process, not an event. Finding your longing and sadness for your loved one triggered after years is not uncommon. Anniversaries, life events, illnesses, among other things, can produce the pain of grief once again. Normalizing such recurrences of grief is the best course of action.

**“Because you feel crazy, you are going crazy.”** Intense grieving often involves thoughts, feelings and behaviors we have never before experienced. We can feel like strangers to ourselves. We can feel out of control. If you or your loved ones are concerned that what you are experiencing is normal, seeking out the counsel of one of the Bereavement Associates at the Pathways of Hope may be helpful.

Being gentle with yourself during the grieving process and having realistic, healthy expectations can be a great gift. Becoming aware of the normal grief process is the best prevention.

*“The first holidays after a loss is an unavoidable part of the grief journey.”*

- There is no right or wrong way
- Plan ahead
- Give yourself permission
- Allow people to comfort you
- Lower expectations
- Reexamine your priorities
- Expect emotions to surface at unexpected times
- Exhaustion is normal
- Make the basics of self-care a priority
- Find ways to honor your loved one
- Plan to do something for someone else
- Include the deceased in your conversations
- Give yourself permission to experience love and joy
- Healing is a process

# Coping With Holiday Grief



For many bereaved individuals, the winter holidays are particularly challenging. The once joyful traditions, rituals and family memories may seem to hold only painful reminders of loss. Although navigating the first holidays after loss is an unavoidable part of the grief journey, the following tips may prove helpful to managing the challenges that the holidays present:

- There is no right or wrong way to handle the holidays. Some will choose to continue traditions, others will modify traditions and some may choose a complete break by planning a get-away holiday.
- Plan ahead by building both structure and support into the season. Do yourself and others a favor by asking for and accepting help.
- Give yourself permission to accept invitations to be with those you enjoy and allow yourself to enjoy the time with them. Likewise, give yourself permission to decline some invitations as your energy dictates.
- Allow people to comfort you. When asked, be honest with yourself and others about what you are feeling. Responses such as “I really miss \_\_\_right now” or “I’m having a tough time this year” are honest answers that help everyone adjust expectations.
- Lower expectations of yourself, others and the holidays themselves. Decide what you can and can’t do and let family and friends know in advance.
- Reexamine your priorities—decorating, cards, baking, shopping, holiday meals are all negotiable. Just because “you’ve always done it” doesn’t mean you can’t modify it or take a year off this year. It may be time for some traditions to be passed on or retired.
- Expect that tears, sadness, loneliness, resentment, anger may surface at unexpected times – the emotional roller coaster that is grief will continue to accompany you throughout the holidays.
- Exhaustion is a normal part of grief, so plan accordingly. Rest and sleep are not a luxury, but a necessity.
- Make the basics of self care a priority- healthy eating, daily physical activity, limiting your use of alcohol.
- Find ways to honor your loved one during the holidays. A memorial gift to a special cause, adopting a needy child or elder, making or purchasing a special ornament, lighting a candle on the hearth or at table in their memory are but a few of many options.
- Plan to do something for someone else—volunteering at a soup kitchen or food bank, visiting with a lonely elder, volunteer at a hospital.
- Include the deceased in your conversations—once others realize that their memories are welcome, you may find yourself enriched by their sharing.
- Ask yourself this question: “If I knew that this would be the last holiday I would have with my family, my friends, how would I want to spend it?” Your answer may give you the permission and strength you need to experience love and joy in the midst of your sorrow.
- Hold on to the knowledge that healing is a process, and that in time, the joys and pleasures of the holiday season will once again be yours to enjoy.



# Hope For the Holidays

## Grief Support Program



By Nancy Gardner-Messer, MSW, LISW  
Bereavement Counseling Associate

With the autumn days upon us, thoughts soon turn to the upcoming fall and winter holidays. Thanksgiving, Christmas and Hanukkah are holidays which typically bring to mind pleasant memories of time with family, good food, and familiar traditions. Yet if you experienced a loss in the past year the upcoming holidays may bring up feelings of concern rather than anticipation as you wonder how you will face the holidays without your loved one. Whether you would like help coping with the holiday season or an opportunity to remember and honor loved ones in a meaningful way, please consider attending our *Hope for the Holidays* program. This hour long program will provide participants with support and suggestions for coping with grief during the holidays as well as the opportunity to remember and acknowledge deceased loved ones. Light refreshments will be available after the program.

In order to better serve families throughout our service area, *Hope for the Holidays* programs will be offered in both the Dayton and Middletown areas. Both of our *Hope for the Holidays* programs will be held on:

**Thursday, December 1**  
**7:00pm**

**Dayton/Kettering**

Presidential Banquet Center  
4572 Presidential Way  
Kettering, Ohio

**Middletown/Franklin**

Hospice of Butler and Warren Counties  
Team and Staff Center  
5940 Long Meadow Dr.  
Franklin, Ohio

In order that we may better serve you, **reservations are required**. When calling to make your reservation please indicate the location you prefer.

For reservations or for additional information, please contact Pathways of Hope, at (937) 258-4991.

## Remembrance Walk to be Held

### Saturday, November 5

Looking for a meaningful way to honor and remember those who have touched your life? Please consider joining us for this year's *Hospice of Dayton 5K Remembrance Walk*. This annual event, which last year drew over 800 walkers, provides families and friends with an opportunity to honor memories of deceased loved ones, while supporting Hospice of Dayton. The circular walk route begins at Hospice of Dayton on Wilmington Avenue and proceeds through the adjoining neighborhood, leading back to its starting point. An alternate route is also available for those who prefer a more abbreviated stroll. Once again, Carl Nichols, retired Chief Meteorologist for WDTN Channel 2, will be our Grand Marshal and Walk Leader. The Walk begins at 10:00 a.m. and registration opens at 8:30 a.m. Proceeds support Pathways of Hope and enable us to continue to offer a variety of bereavement services to hospice families and bereaved members of our community. Sponsorships are available but anyone can participate on an individual basis. Groups can walk as a team made up of co-workers, neighbors, friends or families. For more information and registration materials please call Lori Igel at 937-256-4490 ext. 2230.



# PATHWAYS OF HOPE SUPPORT GROUPS

**Hospice of Dayton memorial services**, which are held six times a year, provide hospice families with an opportunity to come together during the first year of loss to remember their loved one in a non-denominational memorial service. The services are designed to honor Hospice of Dayton patients who have died during a given time frame. Family members are asked to bring a single cut flower for use in the service. Light refreshments follow the service, which lasts less than an hour.

If you are unable to attend the memorial service designated to honor patients who died in the same time frame as your loved one, it is fine if you attend a **later** one.

**We do ask that you wait at least three months following the death before planning to participate.**

Due to renovations occurring at the Wilmington Avenue campus, the

November memorial service will be held off site as noted. Memorial Services on January 15, 2012 will be held at our campuses on Wilmington Ave. and in Franklin/Middletown.

Date	Time	Honoring Patients Who Died Between
Sunday, Nov. 13, 2011 Presidential Banquet Center 4572 Presidential Way, Kettering	3:00 pm	7/1/11-8/31/11
Sunday, Jan. 15, 2012 Hospice of Dayton, Community Room	3:00 pm	9/1/11-10/31/11
Sunday, Jan. 15, 2012 Hospice of Butler and Warren Counties, Team and Staff Centers	3:00 pm	8/1/11-10/31/11

## UNDERSTANDING THE GRIEF EXPERIENCE

The loss of a loved one can be a life-changing experience that challenges the bereaved individual at many levels. Making the necessary but painful adjustments and adaptations can be emotionally and physically exhausting. Knowing what to expect when loss enters our lives can do much to make the grieving process less challenging and more manageable. Taking the time to seek out a better understanding of the grief process can go a long way toward easing some of the pain of grief. For too many, inaccurate information or unrealistic expectations about grief add an additional burden to an already heavy load of personal distress.

*Understanding the Grief Experience* is a 90 minute educational program designed to help the bereaved learn about the grief process. Appropriate for anyone who has already suffered a loss as well as for those who are facing the loss of a loved one, *Understanding the Grief Experience* is a highly recommended starting point. Normal grief symptoms, the stages and tasks of grief, and healing coping strategies will be some of the topics covered. Helpful resources and materials for grieving individuals will be identified. Participants will be provided general information about grief support groups as well as specific information about the various grief support services available through Pathways of Hope or other community resources.

*Pre-registration is not required.* The program is free and open to the general public.

*Pathways of Hope—Hospice of Dayton, 324 Wilmington Ave., Dayton, Ohio*

1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday night of every month from 7:00 to 8:30 P.M.

2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Monday afternoon of every month from 2:00 to 3:30 P.M.

*Butler & Warren Counties—Lorelei's Place at Hospice of Butler & Warren Counties*

2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday morning of every month from 10:00 to 11:30 P.M.

1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday night of every month from 6:30 to 8:00 P.M.

## Grief Support Groups

**G**rief support groups can provide a much-needed bridge over the difficult days, weeks and months following loss. Participants discover that the group is a place where understanding, encouragement, and practical suggestions may be readily found. Just as the stories of others can provide direction and hope in your own journey through loss, you may discover that your experience may benefit others as well.

**P**athways of Hope offers a number of grief support groups designed to meet different needs. Some groups are general grief support groups, while others are groups designed to bring together people that share similar losses. All of our support groups are open to anyone in the community who is coping with

the loss of a loved one. Many of our groups require no pre-registration or commitment to a set number of sessions. Thanks to the generous support of community donors, these services are offered at no cost.

**I**t's up to you how frequently you choose to attend. You are encouraged to attend at least two or three meetings before you decide that the support group isn't for you. If you would like more information, please call Pathways of Hope at (937)258-4991. A current schedule of our groups can always be found on our websites, [www.hospiceofdayton.org](http://www.hospiceofdayton.org), [www.hospiceofwarrenco.org](http://www.hospiceofwarrenco.org) or [www.hospiceofbutlerco.org](http://www.hospiceofbutlerco.org).

**See next page for MORE Groups and Youth support information**

### MEMORIES OF MOM—4-SESSION GROUP—PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED

Support group for adults who have experienced the death of their mother. Commitment to attending all 4 sessions in the series is required. Enrollment will be closed after the first session; pre-registration is required. New groups are offered throughout the year. For more information or to pre-register, please contact Pathways of Hope (937)258-4991.

Pathways of Hope—Mondays, 6:30 to 8:00 P.M.

October 2011 series: 10/10, 10/17, 10/24, 10/31

January 2012 series: 1/9, 1/16, 1/23, 1/30

### FATHERLESS CHILD SUPPORT GROUP—4-SESSION GROUP—PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED

Support group for adults who have experienced the death of their father. Commitment to attending all 4 sessions in the series is required. Enrollment will be closed after the first session; pre-registration is required. New groups are offered throughout the year. For more information or to pre-register, please contact Pathways of Hope (937)258-4991.

Pathways of Hope—Mondays, 6:30 to 8:00 P.M.

November 2011 series: 11/7, 11/14, 11/21, 11/28

February 2012 series: 2/6, 2/13, 2/20, 2/27

### LIVING WITH THE LOSS OF AN ADULT CHILD—TWICE MONTHLY—NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED

Support group for parents who have experienced the death of an adult child.

Pathways of Hope—2nd and 4th Wednesday night of every month from 6:45 to 7:45 P.M.

## WIDOW / WIDOWERS SUPPORT GROUPS

### WALKING THROUGH GRIEF: WIDOW AND WIDOWER SUPPORT GROUP—TWICE MONTHLY—NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED

Widows and widowers meet others experiencing the death of a spouse.

Pathways of Hope—1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday night of every month from 6:30 to 7:30 P.M.

Pathways of Hope—1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursdays of every month from 10:00 to 11:00 A.M.

CENTERVILLE, Christ the King Lutheran Church, 50 Nutt Rd., Centerville

2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of every month from 7:00 to 8:00 P.M.

WARREN & BUTLER COUNTIES, Lorelie's Place at Hospice of Butler & Warren Counties

1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays of every month from 10:00 to 11:00 A.M.

## YOUTH SUPPORT

### SCHOOL-BASED GRIEF SUPPORT PROGRAMS—CALL FOR MORE INFORMATION—(937) 258-4991

#### **Grief Support Groups, Specialized Grief Support Groups, 1:1 Supportive Grief Counseling, Grief Education for Staff and Students, Consultation, Debriefing**

Working together with school administrators, teachers, and parents, Pathways of Hope staff can provide grief support services designed to meet the particular needs of a school community. Over the past five years, Pathways of Hope has provided grief support services in over thirty schools or youth centers in Montgomery, Greene, Clark, Clinton, Butler and Warren counties. Due to the generous support of community donors, these services are offered at no charge to individuals or schools. For informational materials on Healing Pathways programs or consultation, please call Mary Gamage at 258-4991, ext.1153.

### CAMP PATHWAYS 2012—WEEKEND—REGISTRATION REQUIRED

Weekend camp for youths ages 7-17 who have experienced the death of a loved one. \$20/one child, \$30/two children, \$40/three or more children. Financial assistance is available if needed.

Friday morning, June 22 to Sunday afternoon, June 24, 2012 – Joy Outdoor Education Center, Clarksville, OH

\*Children must be registered prior to June 1<sup>st</sup>. Limited space available. Call in February for registration form.

# Teen Retreat Planned for October 22

**L**earning to live with loss is a challenge at any age, but dealing with loss as a teen can feel particularly lonely and isolating. On Saturday, October 22, teens will have the opportunity to meet with other teens who are facing similar challenges. Sponsored by Pathways of Hope, the day long Teen Grief Retreat is an opportunity for teens 13-17 to share memories, learn healthy coping strategies, as well as hang out and have fun with other kids who have lost a loved one. The retreat will be held at Wegerzyn Gardens Metro Park, 1310 Siebenthaler Avenue, from 8:30am until 4:00pm. The program is offered without charge, and lunch will be provided. For more information and registration, call Pathways of Hope at (937) 258-4991.



By Mary Gamage, MSW, LSW  
Bereavement Counseling Asso-

## Healing Pathways Grief Support for Youth

**T**he start of a school year is an exciting time for most children as they meet new teachers, face new challenges and connect with new and old friends. Unfortunately for many students, the shadows of grief and loss follow them into the classroom and onto the playground affecting emotions, behaviors and academic performances. Although the death of a loved one changes a child's world forever, affected youth often struggle to hide their feelings for fear of appearing different than their peers.

**I**t is a difficult experience for everyone – peers, teachers, administration, and parents – to watch a student grieve. Financial and staffing constraints make it difficult for many school systems to provide specialized psycho-social



support to grieving students.

**P**athways of Hope, the grief counseling center at Hospice of Dayton can help. Our professionally trained and licensed bereavement staff is available to assist and provide in school support to grieving students. Working together with school administrators, teachers, and parents, Pathways of Hope can provide grief support services designed to meet particular needs of a school community. A direct call to Pathways of Hope will begin the process.

**F**or further information or to arrange for in school services, please call us at (937) 258-4991. We can be reached Monday through Friday from 8:00-4:30 pm. Due to generous support of community donors, these services are offered at no charge to individuals or schools.

# The Collateral Losses of a Grieving Child

By Jonathan Haag, LISW, ATR-BC

In working with grieving children, I have noticed over the years a source of confusion and hurt that is in addition to the primary loss of a parent or close loved one. These painful aspects of grief are referred to as Collateral Losses. These losses are all the difficult life changes that need to be addressed and adjusted to after a parent dies. Collateral Losses are all the secondary changes that naturally occur after the primary loss of the parent. At times, Collateral Losses can be overlooked, despite the fact that they are painful because the child and family are focusing on the primary loss of the parent. When these Collateral Losses are not addressed, children can easily feel overwhelmed, confused, and discouraged. Children can also feel a great sense of helplessness and anger as the decisions made by families to make adjustment to changes are beyond the child's control.



Examples of Collateral Losses for a child after the death of a parent may be:

- The loss of their bedroom, home, neighborhood, school and friends if the family needs to move due to the death
- The loss of a familiar daily routine
- Changes regarding who provides a listening ear, guidance, and discipline
- A loss of security due to a feeling of concern for the emotional well being of the surviving parent
- A change in the roles and responsibilities of the surviving parent such as returning to full time work
- A change in how, what and who prepares meals, does laundry and other housekeeping chores
- An increased sense of responsibility to care for and support younger siblings
- The loss of a sense of security if there is financial instability or changes due to the death

Gentle honesty, reassurance that the family will get through this together, and inviting the expression of questions and feelings all go a long way in decreasing the painful feelings that come with Collateral Losses. Often times a child's imagination can create far worse scenarios than what is real or will likely happen in the future, so open communication and reassurance can calm a child's fears and instill a sense of hope that things will get better as the family works through their grief. To assist families through primary and collateral losses, Pathways of Hope offers grief counseling and Art Therapy for children and teens.

## *Pathways Breakaway for Kids 7-12* to be held January 16, 2012

**P**athways Breakaway is a day long, grief focused event designed for children ages 7-12, who have experienced the death of a parent or other loved one. Kids will enjoy fun activities such as swimming, gym games, and a climbing wall as well as grief activities involving art, music and discussion groups. Lunch and snacks will be provided.

be out of school for the Martin Luther King holiday. The event, which will be held at the Vandalia Recreation Center, will begin at 8:30am and will end at 5:30pm. The event is offered at no charge, but pre-registration is required as the event will be limited to 40 children. For further information and registration materials, please contact Pathways of Hope at (937) 258-4991.

**P**athways Breakaway will be held on Monday, January 16, 2012, a day on which most children will

# Sandwiched Between Your Own Grief and the Grief of Your Surviving Parent

By Bonnie Orlins, MSW, LISW-S  
Bereavement Counseling Associate

It is a powerful reality to lose a parent. Many factors affect your own grief process. Had that parent been slowly declining? Was it an unexpected death? Had there been a role reversal of you becoming the parent and your parent becoming the child? What was your relationship like with that parent? Was there unfinished business or unresolved issues? Have you handled loss issues in the past? How have you handled loss issues in the past? What other losses or stressful situations do you have going on in your life? Do you have an effective support system?

While you are dealing with your own grief experience, there may be another gnawing force occurring simultaneously. Your surviving parent is also experiencing his or her own grief reaction. As with you as a surviving child, your parent will also have his or her own unique reaction as a surviving spouse. As each relationship is different and each person is unique, your surviving parent's grief experience will be different from your own. Losing a spouse is not the same thing as losing a parent. It is not realistic to assume that you know exactly how your surviving parent feels. If your parents have been married for a very long time, the sense of oneness that may grow between longtime spouses may further complicate the grieving process. Your surviving parent may feel like he or she has lost a limb yet continues to feel phantom pain. There may be no memory of life without the other partner.

You have been delegated a dual role of dealing with your own grief while at the same time helping your surviving parent with his or her own grief. Each of you needs to work through the tasks of mourning but many factors may impact this experience. These tasks do not

occur in a neat and orderly sequence and it is common to move back and forth between these stages.

The first task of mourning is to accept the reality of the loss. While some denial may be protective in enabling an individual to gradually deal with a loss, forgetfulness and /or Dementia, which can be common with an aging parent, can exacerbate the situation. At a time when you are under stress and on edge, it can be particularly trying when a surviving parent may continually forget about the death of a spouse and continually question you about the absence. Another disheartening experience can occur if a surviving parent makes the decision to quickly dispose of all possessions of the deceased spouse.

An explanation may be that sometimes surviving spouses attempt to protect themselves from dealing with the reality of the loss by ridding themselves of any reminders.

The second task of mourning is to process the pain of grief. There can be a myriad of emotions. People may experience anger, guilt, sadness, panic, longing, relief, etc. Grief is sometimes delayed.

After a death, survivors may be occupied with necessary business issues. Your surviving parent may appear to be fine initially, and weeks or months later, a strong grief reaction may surface. There are often unexpected triggers of grief. One may hear a special song or run across a memorable photograph. A surviving parent may not outwardly experience grief because grieving has been occurring over a long period of time. If a surviving spouse was a longtime caregiver, there may have been some disassociation in feeling that the deceased was not actually a spouse but rather just some patient. Some symptoms of grief can be magnified in an aging parent. Forgetfulness, inability to concentrate and focus, disorganization, and lack of interest

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and lack of motivation can all be symptoms of grieving, but they can also go hand in hand with a normal aging process.

The third task of mourning is to adjust to a world without the deceased. Many longtime spouses have embraced very defined specific roles, sometimes traditionally gender specific. An aging man may have relied on his wife to cook and take care of his home. An aging woman may have relied on her husband to make any monetary decisions or to drive. One spouse may have assumed the role of measuring any needed medication. It can be difficult, frightening, and painful to assume new roles at a time when one has less energy and self-confidence due to the grieving process. Some surviving spouses have never been on their own. Their only memories of eating dinner or taking a walk may be as a couple. They have defined their identity as a husband or a wife. The concept of thinking of oneself as a single person after so many years of marriage can seem insurmountable. Spouses may have talked about taking care of themselves and never wanting to rely on their children or they may have discussed a belief that their children should take care of them.

The fourth task of mourning is to find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life. An aging parent may be more isolated and may not have a support system of peers due to such factors as illnesses, deaths, and lack of mobility. An aging surviving spouse may be thinking about end of life issues themselves and may have a hard time contemplating creating a new life with new relationships and interests. It is not uncommon to express a desire to join the deceased spouse. This is usually a passing thought. If a parent talks about hurting him or herself or has had periods of depression, direct that parent to professional counseling.

Considering the above discussed factors of the grief experience, here are suggestions on how to help a surviving parent as well as yourself:

1. Give the gift of patience and understanding. Listen to your parent and encourage conversation about your deceased parent. It is healthy to express and share

feelings and memories. It is helpful to remember that grieverers are more likely to be short-tempered and may be less able to handle minor issues calmly.

2. Encourage your surviving parent to take care of him or herself. Take care of yourself as well. Encourage rest, exercise if allowable, and healthy meals. If cooking is a problem, investigate home delivered meals.
3. Stay in frequent contact with your surviving parent. If you have other willing siblings or other family members, you may want to consider a phone or visit chain to assure frequency of calls or visits.
4. Encourage compliance with medical appointments. Assure that physicians are aware of your parent's and your own bereavement. Grief is stressful. The immune system can be impaired. Alert staff of your parent's living facility about any concerns.
5. Remember and acknowledge important dates and anniversaries. Birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries can often cause grief relapses. Think about having dinner with your parent on an anniversary, but be respectful if your parent declines.
6. Offer to help your parent sort through the deceased parent's possessions.
7. Validate your surviving parent of his or her continued purpose in the family. Encourage activities such as volunteer work which can enhance a sense of purpose.
8. Assess the living situation to assure safety and facilitate necessary modifications or living situations.
9. Investigate a support group for people who have lost spouses. If you are inclined, investigate a support group for yourself for people who have lost parents.
10. If a religious community has been an important part of your parent's life, encourage continued participation. Investigate transportation options if this is a concern. Sometimes church members are willing to help transport other members.
11. Direct your parent and yourself to professional counseling if symptoms do not improve.

The grief journey is a long one but with proper care and work, individuals can effectively work through grief.

## On-Line Link to Back Issues

Back Issues of *The Bridge* can be found on The Hospice of Dayton website at [www.hospiceofdayton.com](http://www.hospiceofdayton.com), [www.hospiceofwarrenco.org](http://www.hospiceofwarrenco.org) and [www.hospiceofbutlerco.org](http://www.hospiceofbutlerco.org). From our home page, navigate to Grief Support to find links to *The Bridge*. Back issues cover a variety of topics which may be helpful to specific concerns and needs.



# The Griever's Bookshelf

*Healing Your Holiday Grief: 100 Practical Ideas for Blending Mourning and Celebration During the Holiday Season* by Alan Wolfelt (2005). Companion Press.

The challenges that the holidays present for the bereaved are addressed in this popular addition to Dr. Wolfelt's *Healing Your Grieving Heart* series. This highly recommended volume provides a wealth of practical and easily implemented strategies for navigating those difficult first holidays after loss. Organized in a succinct and easily read format, Dr. Wolfelt expands briefly on each of his 100 ideas with compassion and understanding of the experience of holiday grief.

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

*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 Ave., Dayton, Ohio, 45420.*



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