More so than in other seasons, winter challenges us with stark reminders of our essential human vulnerabilities. While beautiful to behold, snow-covered landscapes, icy surfaces and bone-chilling temperatures can pose a very real threat to our survival. Dropping thermometers spark a mass retreat to the safe warmth of our homes, providing refuge from the biting winter winds. We layer on insulating clothing, crank up the thermostat and hunker down under quilts and comforters, longing for warmer times and places. Rather than face the winter weather, we venture out only when necessary, anxiously protecting ourselves the best we can from the harsh elements. The sudden snowstorm that paralyzes traffic, downs power lines and temporarily traps us in place, forces us to abandon plans and surrender to that which we cannot control. Dealing with the prolonged challenges and limitations of a cold, hard winter can leave us feeling exhausted both physically and emotionally.

Anyone who has experienced a major loss soon learns that winter has no monopoly on the pain of disrupted plans and the longing for who and what is no longer present to us. We become acutely aware of our vulnerability to loss and unwanted change as we struggle to come to terms with our powerlessness over events outside our control. We may retreat from friends and family for a time, insulating ourselves from the unpredictability of triggers that send us reeling emotionally. We may feel paralyzed by indecision and anxiety, and overwhelmed by the tasks and decisions that face us.

Underlying our efforts to cope with winter’s challenges is our knowledge that even the harshest winds and deepest snows are transient. Experience and faith tell us that the winds will change, slowly warming the earth and awakening the life that has lay dormant beneath our feet. Likewise, the pain we face in the height of our own personal “season of loss” is easier managed with the faith and knowledge that the worst days of grief are indeed transient.

Each challenge faced, each adaptation accommodated, each tear shed, and each risk taken move us closer to a season of personal renewal that will follow as surely as spring follows winter.
One common theme often heard from grieving children, teens and adults is, “I don’t want to talk about it” or “I don’t know what to say.” That’s the great thing about making art. You don’t have to say anything. Once you start making art, it has a life of its own and you’ll soon find that the art you make expresses your thoughts and feelings beyond words. This summarizes the purpose for the new Art Forever After program. One of its main goals is to promote effective grieving through creative visual arts for patient and families of Hospice of Dayton and those in the community experiencing grief. And you don’t have to be “artistically gifted” to benefit.

One new Art Forever After endeavor we are especially excited about for 2013 is a multi-generational art based group for grieving people. We are collaborating with We Care Arts to provide this art based grief group in their art studio space. This group will be offered in 3 month segments; February through April and September through November from 6:30-8:30 pm every Monday evening. The group will be facilitated by Pathways of Hope staff Jonathan Haag. In addition to being an independently licensed Social Worker, Jonathan is a Board Certified Art Therapist. Jonathan will be assisted by several trained Hospice of Dayton volunteers. This group is designed to be family friendly and multi-generational with ages 5 to 105 welcome. Participants will create grief related art activities including scrapbooking, drawings, ceramic and painting projects.

Art Forever After will continue to offer 1:1 art therapy based grief counseling to children, teens and adults to Hospice of Dayton families and the community.

We are also developing other art based activities to offer the community designed to ease the burden of grief. We look forward to telling you more about these activities in the near future.

If you are interested in either of these Art Forever After opportunities, please contact Pathways of Hope for more information.

“...the art you make expresses your thoughts and feelings beyond words.”
Why them? Why now? Why this disease/accident? Why me?
Questions about “Why” often seem to haunt the thoughts of bereaved individuals as they search for peace of mind following the death of a loved one.

When a loved one dies, it may seem as if everything is called into question. We question our actions, our intent, our need, our failure in keeping our loved one safe. We question the actions and intents of others. Even our faith can be challenged as we look for answers and reasons that will help us make sense of our experiences. We search for answers that will provide clarity and allow us to regain a sense of control over the events that shape our lives. Sometimes the search for answers does yield information that helps us better understand or come to terms with our experience. At other times, the search for “why” is a fruitless and painful barrier that keeps us stuck in the pain of grief.

The belief that we are in control of our lives is a very human tendency. This belief shields us from being overwhelmed by awareness of how vulnerable we truly are. It can also “protect” us from surrendering to the pain of acknowledging our powerlessness in the face of death. It is very tempting to believe that we SHOULD have or COULD have done something that would have changed the outcomes. But rather than protect us, this belief can further punish us at a time when we are suffering the pain of grief. It is sometimes hard to accept that we had no control over the events or illness that took our loved one from us. Our preoccupation with the ultimately unanswerable “Whys” can serve as an avenue for venting our anger and powerlessness. It can likewise distract us from facing the pain of our grief process.

When your questioning yields only anger, frustration, and exhaustion, talking with others can be a tremendous help in easing the burden. Pathways of Hope grief support services are available to anyone in the community who has experienced the death of a loved one. A phone call is all it will take to connect with our licensed staff and services designed to help you find peace of mind and healing.

“Do not apologize for crying. Without this emotion, we are only robots.”
- Elizabeth Gilbert
Reminders

Mary Gamage, MSW, LSW

We hear a song on the radio that happens to be our loved one’s favorite. We see a commercial on TV that reminds us of them. We see someone walking down the street that, in the moment, looks like them. At first, these “reminders” precipitate a flood of intense feelings of sadness or loneliness. Just when we thought we were having a good day, we encounter a reminder that causes us to take a few steps backwards into the pain of loss.

Part of our growth on the journey of grief involves learning to accept that reminders are all around us. We come to understand that these reminders can bring us great comfort if we can embrace them as a necessary part of our grief process. As strange as it may seem when we are early in our grief, there will come a time when we will grab on to them and cherish these reminders. Eventually, these reminders will bring about tears of comforting remembrance, instead of the tears of sadness.

“...these reminders can bring us great comfort if we can embrace them as a necessary part of our grief process.”

Grief FAQs

Q: WHAT EXACTLY IS “GRIEF COUNSELING”?

A: Simply put, grief counseling consists of a confidential, guided conversation about your loss experience with a professionally trained counseling professional. It is different than a social conversation in both its structure and purpose. The process involves “telling your story” and describing the problems or dilemmas associated with your loss. Your counselor will likely ask some questions that will help him or her get a better understanding of your situation, concerns and goals. The purpose of grief counseling is to help you gain a better understanding of your loss-related experience, while working toward resolving or learning to cope better with loss related challenges.

You and your counselor will work together to develop a plan to address your particular situation. Based on their knowledge, training and understanding of your particular concerns, your counselor may make specific recommendations, suggest alternatives or possible solutions. As part of your plan, you may be assigned mutually agreed upon “homework assignments”, out-of-session activities designed to help you achieve your counseling goals.

Young Widows Group to meet Third Mondays 4:30-5:30 pm

The meeting time for the Young Widows Support Group is changing to 4:30-5:30 pm beginning on February 18, 2013. The group will continue to meet on the third Monday of the month at Pathways of Hope on Wilmington Avenue.

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Every year between ten and fifteen million Americans will experience the death of a parent. Although it is the most commonly experienced of all losses, its impact on the surviving adult children is often discounted. After all, the thinking sometimes goes, the death of a parent is an expected part of the “natural order” of adult life. For many adults, the death of a parent severs a cherished, adult relationship and friendship that has predictably provided mutual support, encouragement and understanding. For those whose relationship with their parent has been conflicted or difficult, a parent’s death may signal the end of hopes and dreams for reconciliation.

Whether the loss comes at the end of a long illness or steady decline or as the result of a sudden accident or collapse, surviving children are often surprised by the impact that losing a parent may have on their emotions, self image, and family relationships. The loss of a parent likely will trigger unanticipated changes in relationships with the surviving parent as well as siblings. The increasing number of families blended through the earlier remarriage of the deceased parent may leave survivors challenged to reconfirm or redefine “family” relationships in their parent’s absence. With the death of the last remaining parent, adults sometimes report being surprised at how “orphaned” they feel. Grief, which can be exhausting in and of itself, can compromise the energy available to the normal demands of job, children, intimate relationships and other adult responsibilities.

Adults grieving the loss of a parent often find that the extent of their grief is unrecognized or unacknowledged by others. Because the loss of a parent is an “expected” part of the adult experience, support that might be readily offered for other losses may be seriously lacking, leaving the bereaved adult feeling isolated and lonely in their loss.

Support for adults faced with the loss of a parent is readily available at Pathways of Hope. Some individuals will prefer to be seen in individual counseling, while others may prefer the support available in a group setting. Our Loss of a Parent Support Group offers bereaved adults an opportunity to come together with other adults grieving the death of a parent. Comprised of four sessions, the group provides participants with an opportunity to share common experiences, recollect and remember, and identify helpful strategies for managing the challenges associated with this life passage. Groups are offered throughout the year; please see the center insert for dates and times. Pre-registration and a commitment to attend all four meetings are required.

Please call Pathways of Hope at (937) 258-4991 to register for the group or request an appointment for confidential counseling.

“Every year between ten and fifteen million Americans will experience the death of a parent.”
From the time they are little boys, males are often told things like “big boys don’t cry.” This sentiment and other similar messages have left many men with the notion that crying or expressing painful emotions somehow makes them appear weak or less masculine. This common misconception may lead to difficulties when men are faced with significant loss and the grief that accompanies it. While there are many reasons why men might have a more difficult time accessing their emotions, it is not uncommon for bereaved men and women alike to struggle with painful emotions that leave them feeling vulnerable.

It is true that men and women tend to grieve differently. Often times men must first feel they will be respected before they are comfortable sharing their grief. Women, on the other hand, may feel the need for others to relate to her before sharing grief becomes a comfortable and safe option. For many men, painful feelings are often not verbalized. Rather than openly sharing their feelings, many men may instead find tasks or actions that allow them to process their grief.

Author Thomas R. Golden discusses these gender differences from a male perspective in his book *Swallowed by a Snake*. Golden suggests that men tend to see the world through a hierarchical lens. This sensitivity to hierarchy results in a tendency to focus on what can be done about a situation. Action, rather than emotional connectedness, becomes the means by which grief is internally acknowledged and processed.

The preference for problem solving activity over open emotional expression is characteristic of the instrumental style of grieving that has been identified by Kenneth Doka. In contrast, intuitive grievers tend to express intense feelings openly and find solace in sharing their inner experience with others. According to Doka, gender is one of several important variables that influence an individual’s grieving style; personality and culture also play an important role in personal and social expectations related to how grief is expressed and processed.

A lack of understanding about differences in grieving styles can serve to increase the bereaved’s sense of isolation at a time when understanding and support are most needed. It is important to remember that although styles of grieving may differ among men and women, neither gender is spared grief’s pain.
Preparations Underway for Camp Pathways 2013
Jonathan Haag, LISW, ATR-BC

It may be difficult to imagine in the midst of the gray days of winter, but the staff at Pathways of Hope is preparing and gearing up for Camp Pathways, our annual summer camp for grieving children and teens. Camp Pathways offers over 50 grieving children an opportunity to participate in a fun-filled summer camp experience that provides safe opportunities to explore, share, and gain understanding of their grief experiences.

This year’s camp is scheduled to begin on Friday morning, June 21 and will end on Sunday afternoon, June 23. Healing from grief incorporates two basic activities; healthy distractions from grief, including having fun, and paying attention to one’s grief. This three day, overnight camp experience provides grieving children the opportunity for both. Supervised outdoor group activities such as swimming, fishing, canoeing, climbing walls and ropes courses provide fun and healthy distractions. Grief group support activities, evening campfires, a talent show, arts and crafts and a memorial service provide opportunities to pay attention to and express grief. Age specific activities and groups are led by professionally licensed bereavement staff, trained volunteers and outdoor educators from Joy Outdoor Education Center.

Walking Through Grief Groups Provide Support for the Recently Widowed

The shift from the “We” of a couple to the “I” of a single life can be a difficult, lonely and painful process, bringing about major changes in almost every life area. Our very popular Walking Through Grief support groups are designed to provide a safe, understanding and supportive environment for widowed men and women faced with the challenges of life after loss. To enhance accessibility, both morning and evening groups are offered at several locations, with several new meeting times added in recent months. For details about meeting times and places, please see the insert or call Pathways of Hope at (937) 258-4991.

Camp Pathways 2013 will be held once again at the beautiful Joy Outdoor Education Center in Warren County. Pre-registration for camp is now underway and is open to children between the ages of 7 and 17 who have experienced the death of a parent, grandparent, sibling or other loved one. The cost of the camp is minimal-$20 for one child, $30 for two children and $40 for three or more; scholarships are available in cases of financial need. If your child or a child you know could benefit from a fun-filled summer camp experience that includes time with other children who have experienced similar losses, please contact Pathways of Hope at (937) 258-4991 for information and registration materials.

Date:
June 21-23, 2013

Cost:
1 Child = .................$20
2 Children = ...........$30
3+ Children = ..........$40

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**The Griever’s Bookshelf**


In an attempt to answer the question “How do I restart my life?” the author, a widow and psychotherapist, has developed a helpful three stage model of adjustment. Each stage is presented with concrete tasks and skills needed to move to the next stage. The book is written as a compassionate guidebook, providing information, examples and exercises in a step-by-step fashion that will help grievers begin the journey to a new life. Experience suggests that the book is most useful when at least 2-3 months have passed since the death.

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