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So What Now?

Life After Caregiving
page 6



Grief Notes

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“Everyone can
master a grief
but he that has
it.”

— *William
Shakespeare*
.....

Working in a hospice is an interesting environment, one full with the spectrum of human emotions, and one in which we strive daily to support others in their grief journey. We listen, work to understand, and assist people to create a plan of care for themselves so that they can cope with their personal realities in a manner that is satisfactory to them. Regardless of what people know, what we learn, or what we study about grief, loss, bereavement, or the human condition, it remains that when we lose someone we love, it really hurts. The quote by William

Shakespeare, “Everyone can master a grief but he that has it”, calls to mind the idea that we can feel quite helpless and alone when we are grieving. It seems that the way that the universe is arranged for us is that we are not meant to walk the grief journey alone. We must help one another daily as we navigate new realities without the loved one in our life the same way. We must find a way to gracefully accept the help.



Table of Contents

- Addressing the Anxiety Associated with Grief..... 4
- So What Now? Life After Caregiving 6
- The Tribute Wall: An Art-Based Response to a Sudden Death
in a School 11
- Notes on Music and Transitions.....12
- Grief FAQs14
- The Griever’s Bookshelf 15



Addressing the Anxiety Associated with Grief

**Debbie Holt, MS, PCC-S , Bereavement Counseling Associate,
Pathways of Hope Grief Center**

Flutters in your chest, nausea, dizziness, dry mouth, shortness of breath, feelings of restlessness, problems falling asleep, a general feeling of dread - all of these are common symptoms of anxiety, which is a common component of grief. You have lost someone you dearly love and your world has been turned upside down. In addition to the heart-rending feelings of loss, you may feel confused and stressed by the many tasks that are now part of your daily life. If you have been prone to anxiety in the past, you feel its presence creeping back into your daily life. Grief may breed anxiety - but you don't have to be controlled by it. Addressing anxiety actively and consistently is essential. Following are some helpful tips to control anxiety before it controls you!

- **Incorporate relaxation into your life.** Listen to soothing music, take a yoga class, or close your eyes and imagine yourself in a peaceful environment, such as the beach or a beautiful meadow. Let your imagination run free - take in the experience with all five senses. Learn to take deep breaths - breathing in deeply to the count of three, holding the breath for a count of three, and slowly blowing out to the count of three. Imagine yourself breathing in cool, fresh air and blowing out all the stressful thoughts and feelings.

- **Make dietary and lifestyle changes.** Ban or limit the use of stimulants such as caffeine, sugar and tobacco. Engage in pleasurable exercise. Limit television watching or reading that feeds anxious thoughts.

- **Banish anxiety-producing self-talk.** Using phrases like “I can’t do this” lead to feeling helpless, which produces anxiety. Instead, use statements such as “I don’t like doing this, but I will get through this.”

- **Seek out medical advice.** Your doctor may want to prescribe medications to reduce symptoms of anxiety, such as anti-depressants. It is also imperative to have a complete medical exam to be sure symptoms of anxiety are not signs of other disease processes.

- **Talk with someone supportive.** Expressing your grief and fears openly can relieve stress and help you to come up with problem-solving strategies for difficult situations. The grief process often feels frightening and full of unknowns - being aware of the normal symptoms and process of grief can be very beneficial. The bereavement staff at Pathways of Hope can provide reading material, support groups, and individual counseling to help you address anxiety.





So What Now? Life After Caregiving

Bonnie Orlins, MSW, LISW-S, Bereavement Counseling Associate, Pathways of Hope at Hospice of Butler & Warren Counties and Hospice of Dayton

Grief quickly teaches us that the death of a loved one permanently changes many aspects of our day-to-day lives. For those survivors who have been responsible for the care of their loved ones, the end of Caregiving responsibilities results in unique challenges.

You might have assumed the role of Caregiver by virtue of your relationship as a spouse, child, family member or friend. You may have chosen to be a loved one's Caregiver or you may have been "delegated" to the role. Your Caregiving could have evolved slowly over a period of time or suddenly, as in the case of unexpected illness or accident. You could have been providing round-the-clock direct care or managed others who provided care. Whatever the circumstances, you were responsible for another person's wellbeing.

It is likely that Caregiving was a consuming role that included activities such as shopping, lifting, bathing, dressing, feeding, managing incontinence, managing financial and legal affairs, supervising medications, coordinating healthcare, providing social activity, communicating

with family, and providing emotional support. You were probably often physically or emotionally exhausted. You may have become isolated from others due to the demands of Caregiving. You might have been dealing with daily losses of the way things used to be, and may have struggled with the reality that some future plans and dreams might never come to fruition. You may have postponed goals and plans because of your caregiving responsibilities.

The responsibilities of Caregiving may have diminished and transformed your personal identity to one in which “Caregiver” is primary. For some, boundaries became unclear between themselves and their Care Recipient as the Caregiver took on their loved one’s pain.

Former Caregivers may be left with an unclear image of who they have become and how their life will play out. The certainty is that things have changed but where do they go from here?

The certainty is that things have changed but where do they go from here?

Coupled with the exhaustion that is a symptom of grieving, there is often an overwhelming state of exhaustion from the activities of Caregiving. You may experience any of a myriad of feelings...numbness, sadness, emptiness, anger, remorse, relief, uncertainty, guilt, etc. Former Caregivers may be grieving not only for their loved one but also for the loss of the Caregiver identity that they have developed. Caregivers need to find a way to reconnect with their own sense of self and accompanying sense of purpose.

It is important for Caregivers to recognize, accept, and honor their feelings. If a Caregiver is uncomfortable verbalizing

feelings, the possibility of writing or journaling can be a helpful outlet. Even when a death has been contemplated, there is often still shock and sense of numbness when the Care Recipient actually dies. Others may not realize that it may take a while for a Caregiver to work through a variety of feelings, wrongly assuming that the Caregiver only feels a sense of relief upon release from the demands of care giving. Others may not

Continued on page 9



***Growing Through Grief* Groups Provide Support and 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.

understand that the Caregiver may also feel an overwhelming sadness, emptiness, numbness, anger, guilt, etc.

It is helpful to connect with a trusted individual whether it be a friend, family member, or counselor to offer support and to help sort through these feelings. After a Care Recipient's death, there may be necessary details to attend to such as funeral arrangements, settling of the estate, possible changes in living arrangements, and financial concerns. If a Caregiver can connect with a trusted individual at this time, it is helpful to request assistance to protect interests and set appropriate boundaries. It is advisable to refrain from making big decisions at this time until the Caregiver has taken some personal time and done some work to reconnect with his or her own identity.

Contrary to the belief of many other people, there is no timeline or one correct way for individual grieving. With gentle care to oneself in patiently accepting and dealing with feelings and concerns, and adopting a proactive attitude, a Caregiver can learn to draw upon inner strength, again connect with his or her own identity and realize a unique sense of purpose. Caregivers often come to recognize that they have developed an enhanced sense of compassion, insight, and patience-- precious gifts that they take away from their Caregiving experience.

Here is a list of strategies that have helped former Caregivers after the death of their Care Recipients. It may be helpful to look over this list and pick and choose those strategies that feel comfortable for you.

- **Get enough sleep**

- Establish a regular bedtime
 - Allow for short naps

- **Eat nutritious meals**

- Consider home delivered meals if you do not wish to cook



- **Exercise if your health allows; check with your doctor**
- **Visit with a friend in person or over the phone**
- **Recognize and honor your feelings**
 - Talk with another trusted individual
 - Talk with a professional
 - Journal
- **Prioritize**
 - Separate those demands that are self-imposed from those that are necessities
- **Ask others for help**
- **Accept help from others**
- **Allow laughter in your life**
 - Watch a funny television show
 - Talk with a friend who makes you laugh
- **Buy yourself some fresh flowers**
- **Read a book**
- **Realize your limitations and express them clearly to others**
- **Follow through with your own health appointments**
- **Meditate**
- **Get fresh air**
- **Take a trip**
- **Relax**
- **TAKE THE TIME YOU NEED**

Pathways of Hope offers individual and group counseling to accompany you on your journey of healing.

The Tribute Wall: An Art-Based Response to a Sudden Death in a School



Jonathan Haag LISW-S, ATR-BC

The Tribute Wall is designed to provide schools an art-based response to a sudden death of a student or staff member. The Drawn Together Art Program offers to coordinate the creation of a Tribute Wall by offering to facilitate an art making activity for the members of that organization or school, to construct the wall and then take the wall down. This group art activity invites participants to make an art-based expression of loss about the deceased classmate or a condolence to family members on an eight inch square format. The squares are adhered to a six by eight-foot piece of half inch foam core and temporarily hung on a wall at the school. When the Tribute Wall has been displayed for an appropriate period of time per the discretion of the school, then the wall is taken down and the individual squares are removed from the foam core. A digital scrap book using pictures of the squares can be made as a memorial book by a Hospice of Dayton volunteer to be given to the family of the deceased from the school and Hospice of Dayton.

In the last year, the Drawn Together Art Program has completed three tribute walls in Dayton area schools involving approximately 200 students.



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 need to be 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 the experience of 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 FURTHER.** Listen to a few minutes of music of your choice to through a rough spot. Perhaps it's low energy, or no motivation to get something done. 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, loneliness, or another emotion. 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 an 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.



Grief FAQ's:

Frequently Asked Questions about Grief

Since my loved one died I find myself having a hard time concentrating and remembering things. I'm worried that I am becoming more forgetful. Is this normal?

Complaints about concentration and memory difficulties are common among grieving people, especially in the early weeks and months following the death of a loved one. Some of this is related to the general stress and physical exhaustion that is common in the grief experience. The lack of energy that comes with being physically tired and poorly rested dulls not only our physical abilities, but our mental acuity as well. Stress, whatever its source, impacts our ability to process and retain information; grief certainly qualifies as a stressful experience. Active grief also consumes a lot of our attention, making it more difficult to focus our attention elsewhere. Pain, whether physical or emotional, can distract us from focusing on other important matters. As a result, it is very likely that we will find ourselves “forgetting” information that under other circumstances would have been easily recalled. If memory difficulties persist or seem to be worsening, it is important to talk to your physician, as memory loss may have causes other than grief.

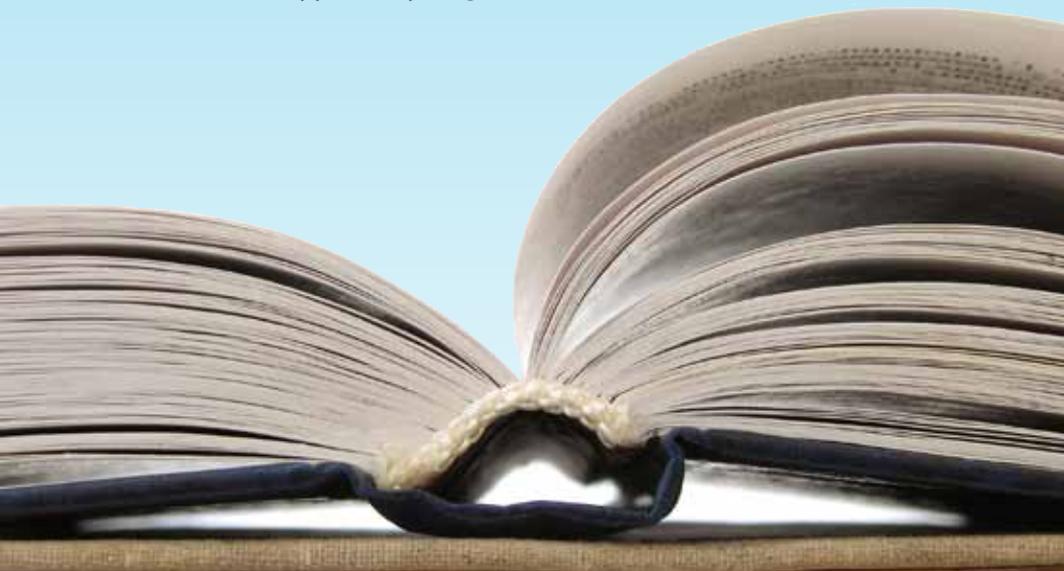
The Griever's Bookshelf

Title: The Wilderness of Grief, Finding Your Way

Author: Alan Wolfelt

Publisher: Companion Press (2007)

Author, educator, and grief counselor Alan Wolfelt likens grief and mourning to a journey through nature's hospitable and inhospitable terrains. Using metaphors that are tangible and visual, he discusses intense, difficult emotions and uses parallels with nature to normalize distressing and frightening grief experiences. His discussion of mourning as a process that occurs in stages demystifies an experience that is often difficult to describe. This book is a good choice for those who feel lost or overwhelmed by their grief and may be particularly helpful to those who gravitate toward nature. His words underscore the message that, despite its sometimes painful path, grief provides us with an opportunity for growth and rebirth.



Featured book may be found at local libraries or purchased through local or on-line bookstores.



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