



Dear Bereaved,

On behalf of our hospice team, we would like to extend our deepest sympathy to you on the death of your loved one. We are writing to offer you support available at Pathways For Grief and Loss. Because we understand a family's needs go on after the death of a loved one, we provide a variety of grief support services throughout the first year of bereavement. Our bereavement mailings are a part of those services and this is the first in a series of letters that you will receive from us over the next twelve months.

We are enclosing some information about our grief support groups and counseling as well as general information about loss and grief. We hope this information will be helpful to you and encourage you to consider using Pathways Hospice bereavement services. Also, if you know of others among your family and friends who may benefit from receiving our support literature, please feel free to give us their names and addresses and we will include them in our mailing.

If you have questions regarding the services that are available to you or if you would prefer not to receive these letters, please give us a call at 663-3500.

We care about you and your family.

Sincerely,

Margaret Hartsook
Grief Counselor

Nancy Jakobsson
Director of Pathways for Grief and Loss

Amanda Hillman
Grief Counselor

Renee Baker
Grief Counselor

Reflections on the Grief Experience

The agony is so great...and yet I will stand it.
Had I not loved so very much I would not hurt so much.
But goodness knows I would not want to diminish that precious love
By one fraction of an ounce.
I will hurt and I will be grateful to the hurt
For it bares witness to the depth of our meanings,
And for that I will be eternally grateful.

Shirley Holzer Jeffrey

"In a time of sorrow it can be consoling to reflect on how our lives have been enriched by the love we have given and the love we have received. Those we have cared about leave treasures behind that time can never take away."

***Comforting Thoughts* by Jean Kyler McManus**

**"A death has occurred and everything is changed by this event.
We are painfully aware that life can never be the same again,
that yesterday is over,
that relationships, once rich, have ended,
but there is another way to look upon this truth.
If life went on the same
without the presence of the one who has died,
we could only conclude that the life we here remember
made no contribution,
filled no space, meant nothing.
The fact that this individual left behind a place that cannot be filled
is a high tribute to this individual.
Life can be the same after a trinket has been lost,
but never after the loss of a treasure."**

Paul Irion

Understanding Grief

Grief, with its many ups and downs, lasts far longer than society in general recognizes. Be patient with yourself.

Each person's grief is individual. You and your family will experience it and cope with it differently.

Crying is an acceptable and healthy expression of grief and releases built-up tension for the bereaved person. Cry freely as you feel the need.

Physical reactions to the death of a loved one may include loss of appetite or overeating, sleeplessness, and sexual difficulties. The bereaved may find that he/she has very little energy and cannot concentrate. A balanced diet, rest and moderate exercise are especially important for you at this time.

Avoid use of drugs and alcohol. Medication should be taken sparingly and only under the supervision of your physician. Many substances are addictive and can lead to a chemical dependence. In addition, they may stop or delay the necessary grieving process.

Friends and relatives may be uncomfortable around you. They want to ease your pain, but do not know how. Take the initiative and help them learn how to be supportive to you. Talk about your loved one so they know this is appropriate.

Whenever possible, put off major decisions, such as changing residence, changing jobs, etc. for at least one year.

Avoid making hasty decisions about your loved one's belongings. Do not allow others to take over or rush you. You can do it little by little whenever you feel ready.

The bereaved may feel he/she has nothing to live for and may think about a release from the intense pain. Be assured that many bereaved people feel this way, but that a sense of purpose and meaning does return to your life. The pain does lessen.

Guilt, real or imagined, is a normal part of grief. It surfaces in thoughts and feelings of "if only". In order to resolve this guilt, learn to express and share these feelings and learn to forgive yourself.

Anger is another common reaction to loss. Anger, like guilt, needs expression and sharing in a healthy and acceptable manner.

Children are often the forgotten grievers within a family. They are experiencing many of the same emotions you are so share thoughts and tears with them. Though it is a painful time, be sure they feel loved and included.

—*Understanding Grief continued*

Holidays and anniversaries of your loved one's birth and death can be stressful times. Consider the feelings of the entire family in planning how to spend the day. Allow time and space for your own emotional needs.

A loved one's death often causes the bereaved to challenge and examine his faith or philosophy of life. Don't be disturbed if you are questioning old beliefs. Talk about it. For many, faith offers help to accept the unacceptable.

It helps to become involved with a group of people having similar experience. Sharing eases loneliness and promotes the expression of your grief in an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding. The bereaved and their families can find healing and hope for the future as they reorganize their lives in a positive way.

*1980, The Compassionate Friends, Inc., P.O. Box 1347 Oak Brook, IL 65021.
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It Takes Courage to Grieve

Grief is a wound that needs attention in order to heal. To work through and complete grief means to face our feelings openly and honestly, to express or release our feelings fully, and to tolerate and accept our feelings for however long it takes for the wound to heal. For most of us, that is a big order. Therefore, it takes courage to grieve. It takes courage to feel our pain and to face the unfamiliar. It also takes courage to grieve in a society that mistakenly values restraint, where we risk the rejection of others by being open or different. Open mourners are a select group, willing to journey into pain and sorrow and anger in order to heal and recover.

From The Courage to Grieve by Judy Tatelbaum, Lippincott and Crowell, 1980

Grief Support Groups: The Five Most Commonly Asked Questions

Everyone seems to have advice on how to cope with the death of a loved one. Some words are wise. Some cause even more pain and some are simply confusing. For example, attending a support group...how do you know if it would be helpful to you? For many, a grief support group may be their first experience of a support group in action. If that's the case for you, here are answers to the top five questions that grieving people ask about support groups.

What exactly is a grief support group?

A grief support group is a meeting of up to 10-12 people, all of whom have experienced the death of a loved one. It's an opportunity to talk about what that experience has been like with a group of people who are likely to understand, since they themselves "have been there." Often, attendees describe a bereavement support group as a "safe place," a place where normal people who have experienced significant losses can tell their stories, knowing that those stories will be respected and held in confidentiality by everyone there.

A grief support group is not a therapy group. When it works well, it is healing...but it is not intended to cure long-outstanding issues of emotional well being. For that reason, most grieving people who have a history of emotional difficulties are encouraged to seek individual counseling for grief-work. Similarly, a grief support group is not primarily a social network. Often, friendships form as people get to know each other, but that is not the purpose of the group.

What happens in a grief support group?

Generally, the facilitator of the group will start by describing the principles by which the group is run. For example, reminding the group that what is said is confidential. Often, each person is then given a chance to introduce himself or herself and to tell as much or as little of their story as they wish. An open discussion period is usually included, as well as educational input by the facilitator. Group sessions have specific topics related to the grief experience.

Who runs a grief support group?

Pathways For Grief and Loss support groups are facilitated by professional grief counselors with specialized training and experience in grief counseling. The role of facilitators is to make sure that the grief support group is a "safe place" and that each person has an opportunity to participate and share. While a professional facilitator may provide some information on the grieving process, the most valuable input usually comes from the group members themselves as they share their stories and experiences.

Why might a support group be helpful?

People who attend support groups find them helpful in several basic ways. First, they are able to connect with people who have had a similar experience and who, therefore, are better able to understand. Second, they can talk about their experience long after others have stopped listening. Third, they have an opportunity to better understand the grief experience and learn about tools to cope with their loss.

How do I choose a support group?

Pathways For Grief & Loss has a variety of grief support groups: for the newly bereaved, for families, specific groups for widowed persons or perinatal loss. If you'd like to visit with one of our grief counselors for help in making a decision, please give us a call.