



Dear Bereaved,

The painful experience of surviving the death of a loved one is even more difficult if you do not have a support system. Family members of Pathways Hospice patients may have spent most of their time caring for their loved one prior to his or her death. This period of time may have been weeks, months or perhaps years. Opportunities to be involved in group functions or to go out with friends may have been limited. You may now find yourself asking, "where do I go?" and "what do I do?" It may have been a long time since you wanted to join a new group or make new friends. Reaching out to others may feel uncomfortable or unfamiliar.

The "Helping Others to Help You" handout is designed to offer ways in which you can aid others to understand your grief experience. Use the "Supports in My Life" worksheet to help yourself identify supports you have now and those you intend to develop.

For more information about groups and events at Pathways Hospice, look for our quarterly newsletter.

Sincerely,

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Grief: Where Do I Go From Here? Redefining Roles and Relationships

When someone loves you, they are a mirror for you reflecting back to you who you are. When that person dies, the mirror is broken and your self-image is shattered. One task of grieving is to create a new self-image. You will always be influenced by the effect of the relationship that you had with your loved one.

Who am I? Your roles change when someone you love dies. You have lost a sense of who you are in the world. Others who care about you can help you gain confidence in yourself again.

Redefining: Changing your roles and your relationships is a slow and painful process. You may choose to keep some of your patterns and discard others if they are no longer useful and appropriate to your different way of being in the world. Eventually you can realize new strengths and resources within yourself and in other relationships.

Trust and Patience: Both of these are essential as you attempt to define your new course in life. —trust that you know what is good for you, remember:

- Try to be patient and gentle with yourself.
- There is no one way or right way to grieve.
- Don't judge yourself or compare your grief to another's grief.
- You cannot bring your loved one back but your life can become more meaningful because that person loved you.
- Try to accept and receive the caring and support that is available to you.

Reprinted from materials from Boulder County Hospice, 1985.

Helping Others to Help You

It is hard for others to learn how to show they care for you. The person who cares often expresses that caring in ways that do not show the real deep-down feeling. Awkward attempts to offer support are well meant but often shockingly naive.

From the reports of hundreds of widows I have talked to, I've put together some of the clichés that I found most disturbing:

- "Time will heal." (I can't wait, it hurts now.)**
- "You're too young to be a widow." (I can't fathom that now.)**
- "Call me and we'll get together." (I feel too vulnerable to call and possibly be rejected.)**
- "You're lucky you have children." (Oh, yeah?)**
- "Well, at least you had twenty good years with him. You should be grateful." (I'm grateful, but I'm still lonely.)**
- "I understand exactly how you feel." (Oh, no you don't!)**

If you have friends or relatives who are awkward with you, realize that they are having problems with your grief. If you can, tell them the following:

- 1. *Call often.*** Tell them that you need their calls even more after the first couple of months. Tell them not to expect you to call them since your energy level may be too low for you to make the effort, even though you may need to talk.
- 2. *Offer a specific date to do something with you.*** Ask them to try to think of your "down" times, evenings and weekends particularly.
- 3. *Feel free to talk about the loved one you have lost, including using that person's name.*** It helps you deal with reality if you can share memories without their being uncomfortable.
- 4. *Realize that although you may seem to be "doing so well," you have a lot of grief to work through.***
- 5. *Avoid pitying you.*** Ask them to put themselves in the position, for a moment, of having others view them as incomplete. Ask them to care about you, but not to pity you.
- 6. *Treat you as a human being, as a real person, not like a china doll or someone without brains.***
- 7. *Express their caring.*** If they feel like crying when talking to you, it's okay. Let them know that crying together is better than avoiding the pain.
- 8. *Rather than offer naive clichés, say nothing.*** A hug or a squeeze of your hand means more than a hundred ill-chosen words.
- 9. *Bring food or invite you to dinner.*** As one woman said, "I have to eat, but it's so hard to cook."
- 10. *Go for walks with you.*** Walking is good for depression and will allow you to "walk off" feelings. Most of us feel awkward around pain or suffering. That, too, is normal. If you are fortunate enough to share moments of pain with your relatives and friends, you will eventually share moments of joy with them as you emerge from your grief.

From Survival Handbook for Widows, by Ruth Loewensohn, 1982.

Supports in My Life

Take time to identify those people, groups and activities in your life, which form your network of support and help to give meaning to your life.

Family members:

Friends:

Neighbors:

Teachers/Counselors:

Clergy:

Colleagues:

Pets:

Educational Activities:

Church/Groups:

Job/Work:

Athletic Activities:

Arts and Crafts or Musical Groups:

Other: