



# Grief can change your world

By Nancy Jakobsson, LCSW

Director of Pathways for Grief and Loss

The death of a loved one, especially when sudden and unexpected, can literally turn your world upside down. Every area of life is impacted, and you may feel like you are "losing your mind."

One of the first things I do when counseling a newly grieving person is give them information about grief that includes a list of all the emotions they may be experiencing, not only the expected sadness but also anger, guilt, fear or relief.

I find that most people are unprepared for the profound impact of grief, the depth of the experience, and all the ways in which life as they knew it changes. I try to prepare them for what they may experience: the inability to concentrate or focus, the lack of energy and motivation.

Some people are under the impression that grief is predictable and follows certain stages. What is more accurate? Grief is unpredictable and does not follow a particular pattern. There are shifts and turns that are often described as wave-like that can overtake you without warning. Even when a death is expected following a long illness, we can not be prepared for all changes that take place. Every loss is different; the same person will have a different grief experience depending on who died. The death of a parent is different from losing a spouse; the loss of a child different from losing a sibling or friend. Each relationship is unique in its own way and so each loss is different.

The way people express their grief can vary greatly. Some of us tend to be more outward grievers, easily express emotions and benefit from sharing thoughts and emotions with others. Others tend to be "private grievers" and are less likely to show feelings in an outward manner. This does not mean the emotions are not present. Their grief may be channeled into an activity or expressed only in private. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. There are, however, certain ways of coping or managing grief that can be unhealthy or even self-destructive. Abusing alcohol or drugs to mask the emotional pain of loss is never a positive or healthy coping strategy and may actually intensify the depth of emotions.

Most people who are grieving the death of a family member or friend will benefit and appreciate support from family and friends. Bereaved persons often feel isolated and alone in their grief. Our culture seems to suggest certain time limits for grief and expect that there is a specific time when one "should be over it and move on." These attitudes tend to further isolate the bereaved person. Compassionate support can come from caring

persons already a part of one's circle of friends and family or from a support group of fellow bereaved. Support groups create a small circle of people who "understand" because of their own loss. Support groups can be a safe place to share one's grief without fear of being judged and to learn from each other. Grief counseling can be particularly helpful following a sudden or traumatic death, if the relationship

with the deceased was conflicted or when dealing with multiple additional stressors, including health or mental health issues.

Pathways for Grief and Loss offers counseling and support groups for adults, teens and children. Anyone who has experienced a significant death-loss is eligible for services, not

just those who are hospice families. Groups are designed for specific losses and are age appropriate. There are also groups that use creative therapies, including art therapy and writing. Pathways Grief Counselors are licensed professionals with specialized training and experience in grief and loss. Counselors who work with children have training in play therapy.

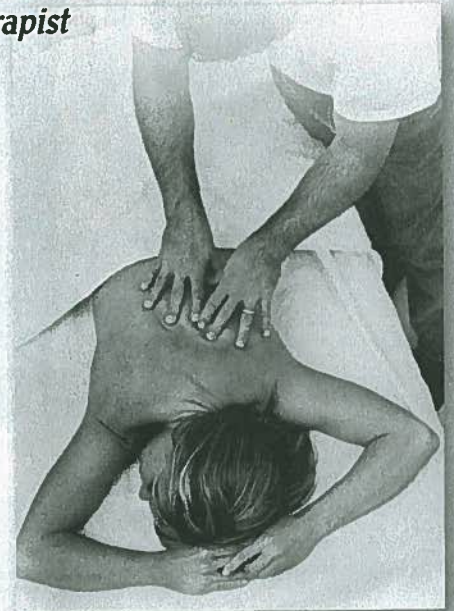
For information on available resources for grief and loss in Larimer and Weld Counties contact Pathways for Grief and Loss at 970-663-3500.



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