

Healing Steps

Words of Encouragement, Hope, and Healing



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Navigating through the roadblocks of grief



by Marla Mobley, MA, LPC
Grief and Loss Counselor

GRIEF has often been compared to a journey that must be traveled.

For some people the road is long and difficult with many bumps along the way. The destination may be unknown, even

frightening at times, often leading into what seems like a deep valley. The climb out may even seem overwhelming, almost impossible. Sometimes we get stuck spinning our wheels leaving ourselves exhausted.

Unfortunately, directions are not provided at the time of birth or death — maybe because there are no two alike.

Instead, a road map may be helpful to avoid some of the potholes and move us as smoothly as

possible through our grief journey. Most importantly, we do not heal by getting over grief, we heal by going through grief. So when we stop in our tracks and feel paralyzed, what can we do?

First of all find someone, preferably someone who is a good listener, then talk and talk and talk.

Tell your story time and time again. This enables you to move from denial into acceptance of death; yes, they are really gone, and, no, they will not be walking through the doorway.

For those who prefer not to talk so much, there are a variety of grief workbooks available at bookstores to

assist with writing exercises.

Remember, acknowledging the death heals us, allowing a peaceful, clearer picture of our loved one, ultimately bringing us closer through memory.

Secondly, reconsider the "if onlys" and "should haves." "If only I had known" or "I should have made him see the doctor sooner," are statements frequently expressed.

It has been said, "Guilt is the gift that keeps on giving." In

other words, stop beating yourself. Ask yourself a few simple questions: Did I intentionally do harm? What would my loved one tell me about the guilt I am feeling?

Ask yourself yet another question: Have I always been on my back? Am I my worst enemy? If the answers are yes, then maybe it is time for a

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Annual Memorial Service

HospiceCare's Annual Memorial Service is planned for **Sunday Nov. 5, from 3 - 5 p.m., at the St. John XXIII Pastoral Center**, at 100 Hodges Road, in Charleston. Hosted by the Bereavement Department, this event enables our hospice families to join together for a time of loving remembrance, reflection, meditation and prayer.

The service will include readings and beautiful music to enhance the celebration of life and to encourage hope and healing.

Please mark your calendar for this special service.

For more information, call (304) 768-8523.

change in you. What better way to honor your loved one, by being kinder to yourself.

One final thought: There may a need to change your definition of what it means to "be strong." A statement often heard when someone is dealing with grief is, "I've always been such a strong person." What are they really saying? "If I show my tears people will think I'm weak," or, "I am not supposed to be angry with God."

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The Forgiving God

by Boyd C. Purcell, Ph.D.
Board Certified Chaplain

Many years ago I stopped being surprised by the large number of people who tell me that they have confessed their sins but do not know whether God has forgiven them. I am, therefore, not surprised by the large number of people who express fear of dying for the same reason—lack of assurance that their sins, though confessed, have been forgiven!

According to a Gallup Poll, reported in the National Hospice Organization Newslines, January 1998, 56% of Americans admit being afraid to die for fear of not having been forgiven of their sins. These are just the ones who admit it. I am confident, based on my experience, that the actual percentage is far greater since many people are so afraid to even talk about it that they may not discuss it with anyone until near the end of life.

As the hospice chaplain, I hear this fear expressed almost every day as I visit patients in their homes, in a 16-county area, or at The Hubbard Hospice House. One man recently told me that he is a Christian and that he confesses his sins every day but still does not know whether he has been forgiven. He lamented, "I am afraid to die!"

At times, those who have been spiritually abused and, thus, have a tyrannical view of God, even perceive good persons such as The Pope, Mother Teresa, or spiritually mature religious leaders or laity, of various religions, as being more loving and forgiving than God. After recovering from his gunshot wound, Pope John Paul forgave the would-be assassin who almost took his life. Mother Teresa interceded to try to keep a murderer from being executed. After the terrorist Al-Zarqawi was killed in Iraq by U.S. Special Forces, the father of Nick Berg, who was

beheaded by Al-Zarqawi, said that he had already forgiven him. He stated that he takes no pleasure in the death of any human being even the death of the man who murdered his son!

After President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated by Booth, at Ford's Theatre, the President's only body guard, who was so absorbed in the play that he failed to protect the President, apologized to his widow. Mrs. Lincoln told him that she could forgive him but not the assassin. But, their son, Tad, who heard his mother, said that if his father had lived he would forgive the man who shot him. According to an historic account, Tad said, "Pa forgave everybody."

Such stories of human forgiveness tend to warm our hearts and, hopefully, motivate us to do

likewise. It is, however, absurd to believe that human beings, regardless of how good and loving they may be, are more loving and forgiving than God who is the source of all love! God's very nature, the essence of true love, is to forgive!

The prescription for assurance of forgiveness is very simple: We confess — God forgives. This assurance is based on faith not a feeling. With this assurance that our sins have been forgiven, we should make restitution to the ones we have wronged, to the extent possible, and forgive those who have wronged us as God has forgiven us.

With this understanding, it is gratifying to see patients' fear of dying diminish and then disappear as I share with them God's unconditional love, amazing grace, infinite mercy, and total forgiveness.

GRIEF RECOVERY GROUPS

Beginning grief recovery groups are designed for teens and adults who have experienced the loss of a loved one. The group setting provides a safe, non-threatening atmosphere for each person to learn about grief and its impact.

Sometimes it just helps to know you are not alone in your grief journey and there are others who can relate to your experience.

There are a variety of instructional methods used, including videos, handouts and group discussions.

All support groups meet at HospiceCare's main office, 1143 Dunbar Ave. in Dunbar.

To register, please call the Grief & Loss Department at (304) 768-8523.

Summer/Fall Schedule

Teen Groups


6 - 7:30 p.m. Thursdays,
July 6, 13, 20, 27

Adult Groups

Three six-week programs,
6 - 8 p.m. Tuesdays:

- ♦ Aug. 1, 8, 15, 22, 29
and Sept. 5
- ♦ Sept. 19, 26, and
Oct. 3, 10, 17, 24
- ♦ "Holiday Group"
Nov. 14, 21, 28,
and Dec. 5, 12, 19

Developing a Memory Relationship

 for body, mind
and spirit
www.hospicecarewv.org

by David McQuain
Grief and Loss Counselor

At some point after the death of a loved one, grievors begin the process of dealing with the reality that their day-to-day bond with the deceased has been severed.

Coming to terms with this new reality can trigger numerous physical, emotional and spiritual reactions within grievors as they realize that their direct physical and emotional energy connection with the deceased has ended.

Grievors begin to withdraw this energy from the deceased and reinvest it into the living, since only the living are capable of receiving and reciprocating this energy. Grievors remain connected to the deceased, but now it's through a memory relationship.

Early on, memories of the deceased are not always comforting and may be very painful to the griever. Oftentimes, the predominant memories are of the terminal illness and the symptoms exhibited by the loved one as the disease process ran its course leading to the death, which the griever may have witnessed directly. Even as the griever is able to focus on good memories of the shared experiences with the deceased, this may still elicit great sorrow since it only acts as a reminder of all that has been lost.

For many grievors, the act of remembering may threaten to overwhelm them with feelings of sadness, anger, guilt and emptiness. Sometimes grievors avoid all those things that may cause them to remember. But grief work is not a process of forgetting, instead it is being able to remember with less pain as time goes on.

Memory work can be difficult and takes energy and courage to pursue. Memory work is a task of

examination and review that will be taken up and put aside again and again. Developing a memory relationship of the deceased can be facilitated by:

♦ *Reviewing your life with the deceased and sharing memories of your unique love story with family, friends, clergy, support group participants and counselors.*

♦ *Establishing a journal to record your memories of the deceased and the thoughts, emotions and feelings they evoke. Journaling is a good option for those who have a limited support network to rely on.*

♦ *Creating grief rituals and memorials to help remember the deceased in loving, peaceful and healing ways.*

♦ *Utilizing an active prayer life to recognize regrets, to comfort pain and to promote forgiveness.*

As grievors rebuild their lives, they will want to remember the good qualities and influences of the deceased and incorporate those positive influences into their new lives. Grievors should be able to remember the good times without idealizing the past and idolizing the deceased.

Grievors need to view the deceased in the context of being fully human which includes faults, weaknesses and the negative aspects they brought to the relationship. It can be difficult to acknowledge the negative aspects because grievors may feel they are being disloyal and disrespectful towards the deceased.

Grievors must review painful memories, family tensions, traumatic issues and unfinished business. Thinking about the past, including regrets can help grievors find new

direction in their lives that they may have been prevented from exploring prior to the death.

Developing a memory relationship can evoke painful feelings, but over time, memories can be the griever's most valuable resource to promote comfort, direction, meaning and healing.

Support Around the Valley

Charleston Area Medical Center's Cancer Patient Support Program

offers individual, family and group counseling for cancer patients and their families as they are touched by the cancer experience.

Call (304) 388-9082.

♦
Compassionate Friends, for bereaved parents, meets from 7-9 p.m. on the fourth Monday of each month at the CAMC Family Resource Center.
Call (304) 388-2545.

♦
Bi-Polar Support Group offers free support for families with a member with bi-polar illness. The group meets from 6-7 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month at Blessed Sacrament Church, 305 E Street, South Charleston.
Call (304) 388-2545.

♦
Pregnancy Loss Support Group meets on an as needed basis. If you would like to attend, please call (304) 388-2545.



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Grief knows no boundaries and transcends every walk of life. The fact that we question our faith and purpose in life may tell us we are in a place of spiritual growth and this alone takes an act of courage and strength.

As a grief support group member courageously admitted, "I used to tell people to trust God" prior to death. After the loss, the words came back with a haunting sting and for some time the member was unable to speak the words. I dare to say "being strong" and "trusting God" have a deeper meaning in the life of this group member because of the willingness to question personal beliefs.

Remember, you are not alone in your grief journey. There are those among you trodding along the road. Some have traveled long and far, while many have just begun. My prayer for you dear weary traveler comes from an Irish Blessing:

*May the road rise up to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
May the rains fall soft upon your fields,
and, until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.*

People in mourning have to come to grips with death before they can live again. Mourning can go on for years and years. It doesn't end after a year: that's a false fantasy. It usually ends when people realize that they can live again, that they can concentrate their energies on their lives as a whole, and not on their hurt, and guilt, and pain.

— Elizabeth Kubler-Ross
