

Parent’s Corner

WHEN CHILDREN NEED PROFESSIONAL HELP

Just as it is sometimes difficult to tell the difference between grief and depression, it is also difficult to tell the difference between normal childhood grief and a grieving child who needs special help. Whether a child needs more than a parent can give depends, of course, on the parent’s capability. An actively grieving parent is often less able to see and be responsible to a child’s needs.

The following guidelines may help you determine whether or not a child needs professional help to handle a loss. Many children will show some of these symptoms and behavior changes after a loss, but the intensity and duration of the symptoms will be greater when the grief is more complicated. A child who shows these signs may need outside help.

- Unable to talk about the dead person or to bear mention of the loss;
- Extreme guilt, denial, disbelief, fear, anger, panic, or despair to the point of interfering with the child’s ability to return to daily routines;
- Marked changes in personality including acting extremely hostile or withdrawn, behaving like the person who died, or compulsive care-giving;
- Releasing anger in unhealthy ways toward himself or others. For example, fights at school, cruelty to animals, accident-prone behavior, and threatening suicide;
- Sleeping too much or too little; changes in appetite that produces a lot of weight gain or loss;
- Physical symptoms, such as upset stomach or getting sick, which do not stop after a reasonable length of time and which a doctor cannot attribute to a physical problem;
- School work that takes a dramatic decline or a new fear of school;
- Acts of delinquency or drug/alcohol use.

There are some additional circumstances that are associated with an increased risk for complicated grief. When combined with the above symptoms, or if serious on their own, they are signs that your child may need professional help.

- The child had either a difficult or overly close relationship with the deceased;
- The child has a difficult relationship with remaining family members;
- The child is being asked to take over the role of the parent or sibling who has died; and
- The news of the death was kept from the child for a long time or the child was told lies.

Help is available from school counselors (who should be told about the child’s loss regardless of his or her reactions), therapists in private practice, Licensed Clinical Social Workers; Marriage and Family Therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists) who are skilled at working with grieving children. In addition, hospices have special bereavement programs for children. If you see any of the above warning signs, or feel that things are not right, call your child’s school for referrals in your area.



“Nothing about death,
is quite as scary as
the exhilarating terror
of trying
to accept life”

Barbara Davidson

Join us at one of our annual events

BUTTERFLY RELEASE

To Be Announced
Details to come
Call for information

LIGHT UP A LIFE

To Be Announced
Details to come
Call for information

All of these events are open to the community
For more information, contact the Hope Bereavement Center at (760) 431-4100

Hospice of the North Coast • Hope Bereavement Center
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Call us to schedule individual grief counseling and/or group information.



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Grief’s Journey

Grief’s Journey, Issue Five



Dear Friend

If you only find one message from these mailings, we hope it is this: no matter how deep your sorrow, you are not alone. Others have suffered profound loss and they can help share the load if you will let them. They may be friends or family. They may be new people you meet as you reach out or people who touch you through their writings.

As you know, adjusting to life without your loved one takes a great deal of effort. It often requires changing your daily habits and patterns as you begin to reconstruct your life in ways that make sense for you. Making these adjustments is part of the process of rediscovering yourself. In the midst of so much change and strong emotion, we hope that you’ve found some helpful strategies for dealing with this difficult period of transition. This issue of Grief’s Journey contains specific suggestions about how to use music and other creative activities to ease your journey through grief.

HABITS AND PATTERNS

When you live with another person, you form habits and patterns that often rely on others to help us meet the daily needs of a household. You also depend on the significant people in your life to share your emotional issues, to be there to listen, to solve problems, or to share your excitement, joys and sadness.

When you realize that your loved one won’t be there to talk to when you arrive home, or you go to the telephone to call, your tears may surface. You may catch yourself making a mental note to tell your loved one about something and realize with a jolt that you can’t share it with him. Gradually, you will accept the reality of the death and stop anticipating the old relationship patterns. Perhaps you will find others who can meet some of those needs.

Beginning to Reconstruct Your Life

Even after many months have passed, your pain and confusion still may be acute. However, you are healing, even though you may not consciously recognize or be aware that your recovery is taking place. As it happens, you may see that your habits are still erratic and changing from your old routines. Even small change reduces your denial and allows reality to creep in slowly.

Rediscovering Yourself

Identity issues are a major part of your journey through grief. It can be both painful and joyous when you attempt to

answer the question, “Who am I now?” It is often a surprising task when you search for and establish a new and separate personal identity. You may expect to “get back to normal,” not realizing that you are changed forever and can never return to who you were.

You may immerse yourself in tightly scheduled activities as a way to avoid pain and to prove your own self-worth. By keeping yourself busy, you may leave yourself no room to think about or feel pain. You may become “driven” and leave yourself no time for rest and, as a result, become completely exhausted. At times, this schedule can become even more complicated if you feel that you have failed your loved one. A sense of failure, inadequacy or guilt may compel you to prove your worth, especially to yourself, by keeping busy. It would be so simple if this worked, but unfortunately it doesn’t! Keeping busy will not resolve your grief. Before you can find peace, you must come to terms with your guilt, anger, and fears, and find a way to go through and move forward.

*“Mourning doesn’t mean being sad,
it means you have to untie yourself from the
relationship”*

Therese Rando

Is It Worth Picking Up The Pieces?

The separation that you experience when someone you love dies may leave you with a sense of futility and hopelessness. You may feel crushed, splintered, broken into pieces, and not sure of ever being useful or beautiful again.

Don’t be surprised if self-destruction crosses your mind. You may feel ashamed of it, but you may be attracted to death too. “Wouldn’t it be better to be with my loved one?” and “I can’t go on feeling so much pain.” However, even thinking about death leads to a greater sense of isolation. Remember, it can help to talk about these feelings. Others have rebuilt their lives on the shambles of despair.

Gather hope and courage from others. The noted minister and writer, Reuben K. Young Dahl wrote:
“During the war (WWII), the rose window in the great Rheims cathedral was shattered into bits by an indirect hit. The parishioners lovingly got down on their hands and knees to gather together all the tiny pieces of broken glass. When the war was over, they hired the most skilled workmen available to rebuild it, piece by piece, from the gathered fragments. Today’s rose window in Rheims is more beautiful than it ever was. So, God can take our broken lives and reshape them, piece by piece, until we can resume life as someone to whom sorrow has given new wisdom and beauty of spirit.

Inspired by Herb and Mary Montgomery – Beyond Sorrow: Reflections on Death and Grief.

How long will you drift?

Being alone, adrift, and without direction can be frightening. You may question your values and the goals you had before the death. You may find yourself asking about the meaning of life and asking, “What should my new direction be?” You may find that feelings of listlessness and self-pity consume your thoughts. You may even be unable to reach out and, as a result, plunge deeper into gloom. Your inactivity breeds fatigue and prevents you from seeing new possibilities.

Be patient; as you work through your grief you will regain a sense of direction. This time of reflection can help you realize that despite your pain, you are still capable of growing, giving and loving.

Every time you reach out to make a small act of caring, you make progress. As you make conscious decisions to re-involve yourself with determination and purpose, you will rediscover meaning and answers.

Who Am I?

“After my son died, I felt like no one needed me. He was so little and counted on my being there for him every day.”
“I’m only beginning to realize how much I did to please my husband and win his approval. I don’t have a reason to do things now. I feel like half a person.”

Like these people, you may feel that part of you died when your loved one died. Your identity was woven into the life you shared with the person who died. It is understandable that your whole sense of self may be unraveling and you may find yourself stopped short by the question, “Who am I now?” Reflecting on this question may help you put things into perspective. It takes time to understand and adjust to the change and to become comfortable with the new person you are becoming. Talking with friends, journaling or meditating can be a way to gather together the loose threads.

As you get to know yourself better, the following questions may spark your thinking:

- How have my responsibilities changed?
- What new habits and routines have I established?
- What emotional needs of mine are going unmet as a result of the loss?
- How can I begin to address these needs?
- Who can I count on to be there for me?
- Do I adequately seek out potential sources of support in my life?
- What gave me a sense of purpose and satisfaction before?
- What now?
- Has my image of myself changed?
- What role do I play in how people respond to me and my loss?
- Have my values and beliefs changed?
- How have my priorities changed?
- What have I learned about myself?
- How am I the same, and different?

“The first rule is to keep
an untroubled spirit.
The second is to look things
in the face and
know them for what they are.”

Marcus Aurelius

The Gift of Music

Fully experiencing and expressing grief is the only sure way to healing, to growing and to finding new meaning in life. Any activity that enables you to more completely feel and express your emotions, thoughts, and ideas can be a vehicle for healing. In addition to talking and writing, art, music, and dance can help you in your journey toward wholeness. You don’t have to be a professional artist to engage in creative activities. Most adults are alienated from their own creative urges, but it is important to remember that, as humans, we are creative by nature.

Our experience has shown that listening to certain music helps grieving people in a variety of ways. Studies have shown that music can be used to:

- Relax, renew, and soothe. Lowering your stress level generally promotes healing.
- Mobilize and energize. Sometimes the music can help you find a different perspective on your life and empower you to resolve inner conflicts and obstacles to healing and growth.
- Enhance concentration, learning, and memory retention.
- Stimulate creativity and imagination.
- Improve problem solving and decision making.

Of course, choosing the right music at the right time is the key. The following are a few suggestions. The pieces of music are grouped into various categories based on how they impact the listener. As you begin to experiment with the different pieces, notice which pieces work best for you in various situations, times of day, moods, and settings.

Sound Prescriptions for Grief

Music for Waking Up – Preparing to Face A New Day

Greig	-Peer Gynt Suite
Vivaldi	-The four Seasons

Music to Help You Fall Asleep

Bach	-Air on a G String
Debussy	-Clair de Lune
Pachelbel	-Canon in D

Music to Relax and Relieve Stress

Beethoven	-Symphony #6
Mozart	-Concerto for Flute and Harp

Music to Quiet Your Home

Galway, James	-(soloist) The Magic Flute
Mendelssohn	-Midsummer Night’s Dream
Tchaikovsky	-Waltzes for Sleeping Beauty, Nutcracker and Swan Lake

Music for Clear Thinking or Studying

Bach	-Brandenburg Concertos
Brahms	-Violin Concerto

Music to Air Anger

Beethoven	-Two Concertos for Two Pianos
Dexter	-The Golden Voyage
Handel	-The Harp concerto

Music to Relieve Depression

Beethoven	-Emperor Piano Concerto #5
Mozart	-Heffner Symphony #5
Rachmaninoff	-Piano Concerto #2

Music to Energize Your Day and Help You Focus

Bach	-The Brandenburg Concertos
Beethoven	-Symphonies #1,2,8
Smetana	-The Moldau

Music for Meditations and Prayer

Back	-Sheep May Safely Graze
Dvorak	-Cello Concerto (2nd movement)
Dvorak	-Symphony #9, “New World”
Mahler	-Symphony #4 (3rd movement)

Music for Empowerment, Motivation and Assertiveness

Beethoven	-Piano Concerto #5
Mozart	-Eine Kliene Nachtmusik (A Little Night Music)
Wagner	- Ride of the Valkyries

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You may have some of these selections in your own music collection. If you are unfamiliar with classical music but want to try it without investing a great deal of time, energy and money to build your collection, look for CD sets that combine the work of a variety of musicians/ classical masters. These are readily available and often are grouped in sets according to the predominant mood they create (e.g. classical relaxation and meditation, power music, etc.) Start with one or two selections from each category and see what happens!

You can use the music alone or in combination with other expressive activities like writing, drawing, dancing, or exercising. Music can help you to focus your thoughts and stir your creative juice as you write in your journal or draw. It can start you moving and help you release the tension in your body that you may be storing.

The following are some concrete exercises to help you learn to use music. Give yourself permission to try them, even if they sound strange. This is not about creating a work of art, choreographing a ballet, or writing a novel – it’s about allowing yourself to more fully experience and express all of the feelings of grief to heal.

Conducting to Music

Conducting can be extremely useful to release stress and negative emotions. It also helps generate energy and motivation. Turn on a piece of energetic music like Beethoven’s 7th Symphony or Eine Kleine Nachtmusik and pretend you are a famous conductor. Let your arms and hands move freely to the music as if you actually conducting an entire orchestra. This is a great way to connect with a sense of personal power as well as a safe and constructive outlet for the anger, frustration, and anxiety which are common throughout the grief process.

Although grief takes both work and energy, it does not have to always be arduous. Using creative vehicles like art, music, movement and dance can lighten the burden and ease the tasks of grief.