

“Only the people who avoid love can avoid grief. The point is to learn from it and remain vulnerable to love.”  
John Brantner

## Reaching Out For Support

Even though grief is a normal, natural response to loss and death, many of us are still unprepared for the depth of the pain that we experience. We often hear messages that imply we “should be better by now,” or “everyone experiences grief and you don’t need counseling or support from anyone else.” So often, we don’t easily reach out to others for support, thinking we should be able to handle this ourselves. In fact we may have “bought in” to the expectations of others and told ourselves that “we should be over this by now,” even though it may only be a few weeks or months since the death. This is unfortunate, as we then deprive ourselves of the social support which is a necessary component of the healing process.

Some grievers even shut themselves off from others in their own families or their close friends fearing that they may burden them or add to their pain.

It is important to hear that “grief shared is grief diminished” and “grief heals best in a social context.” We hope *Grief’s Journey* will help by educating you about the grief process, and will give you ideas of what to expect, and coping tips to get through your grief, not over or around, but *through*. It represents courage and strength to lean into your pain, and we hope *Grief’s Journey* can be a support and companion in your journey.

*Join us at one of our annual events*

### BUTTERFLY RELEASE

**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.**



“Great love  
brings  
great grief.”

Be thankful  
for both.”

Anonymous

 **HOSPICE of the  
NORTH COAST**

# *Grief’s Journey*

*Grief’s Journey, Issue One*

Dear Friend,

When a loved one dies, the family continues to need long-term care and support. *Grief’s Journey* continues to provide this care throughout your first year of bereavement.

*Grief’s Journey* is a 12-issue, monthly newsletter that combines general information about loss and grief with proven tips and coping strategies. This information will be helpful throughout your grieving process; we have included a folder for you to save each issue for future reference.

*Grief’s Journey* may ask you to challenge societal myths or time-honored expectations about grief as you integrate the grief into a healing place. Inside you will find suggestions and information that validate your feelings and normalize many of the reactions you may experience.

If talking about your loss, or your reactions or concerns would be helpful, we encourage you to seek support from people who are open to you and who are knowledgeable about the grief process. Sharing how you are feeling can help.

## BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT SERVICES CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Bereavement support can help you and your family as you move through the grieving process.

We encourage you to reach out to bereavement services that:

- Are provided by professionally trained, caring, compassionate people who listen to your concerns.
- Educate about the grief process, and help prepare you for what you may experience during your own bereavement journey.
- Encourage you to become involved in a new life, when you are ready, to seek out new support persons, groups, and activities.
- Are available through hospices, hospitals, churches and counseling agencies, with counselors who are specifically trained in the grief process.

Communication and acknowledgment of your feelings often help people during their grieving process.

Grief heals best when shared with others – it helps to:

- Share thoughts and ideas with others to help clarify the meaning and effects of the loss.
- Discuss and share painful feelings such as despair, anger and guilt to help reduce their intensity and endure them.
- Reminisce about your loved one to help enrich and deepen your understanding of the relationship you shared.
- Join others at bereavement support groups.
- Participate in support and counseling programs for individuals or families that are focused on the grief process.

## Grief – A NORMAL AND NATURAL RESPONSE TO LOSS

Grief can be so painful and overwhelming that it can frighten and confuse us. Many of us worry about whether we are grieving in a normal and healthy way. It may help to know that most people who suffer a loss experience similar feelings. One or more of the following are normal and natural reactions to a loss.

- Tightness in the throat or heaviness in the chest
- An empty feeling in the stomach and loss (or gain) of appetite
- Restlessness and the desire to look for activity, but having difficulty concentrating
- Feeling as though the loss isn't real and that it didn't actually happen. This may include trying to find your loved one.
- Feeling a sense of your loved one's presence, including expecting him or her to walk in the door at the usual time, hearing his or her voice, or seeing his or her face
- Difficulty sleeping and having frequent dreams or visions of your loved one
- Assuming mannerisms or traits of your loved one
- Feeling guilty or angry over things that happened or didn't happen in your relationship with the person who died
- Feeling intensely angry at your loved one for leaving you
- Feeling as though you should not talk about your feelings of loss because other people seem uncomfortable when you do
- Experiencing sudden mood changes over the slightest things or without explanation
- Crying at unexpected times
- Feeling despair over beginning a life without your loved one

It is important for you to talk and let out your thoughts and feelings with people when you need support. If you are concerned or worried about your reactions, this is the time to contact a grief professional for support.

## UNDERSTANDING GRIEF

Grieving is a natural healing process that moves slowly from the pain of loss to hope for the future. Although grieving has been studied, no one can understand your grief as well as you do. We urge you not to compare your grief with others. "Your grief is the worst grief, because it is yours."

However, it may help to know how others cope with their grief. For example, one bereaved father said of his loss, "You don't get over it, you just learn to live with it."

### Coping with Grief

Crying is one way of coping with grief. Your tears express your sense of loss and they help you release built-up tensions. Crying is not a sign of weakness, but a way of cooperating with the natural healing process.

You may react physically to the death of a loved one, experiencing a loss of appetite, or overeating, sleeplessness or over-sleeping, sexual difficulties, lack of energy, difficulty concentrating, or other physical problems.

It is best to avoid drugs and alcohol because when taken in excess they can stop or delay the healing process. Prescription medication should be used sparingly and only under a physician's care. Certain responses such as a severe clinical depression should be brought to your physician or psychiatrist for assessment for medication. But remember a certain amount of depression comes along with grief. It is when depression goes on to take "a life of its own" that it is important to consult with the appropriate grief professional or physician.

After your loss, you may feel you have nothing to live for and you may long for a release from the intense pain. Be assured that others have faced despair; in time their pain has lessened and a sense of meaning and purpose has returned to their lives.

When your thoughts linger on past mistakes, real or imagined, you may find relief by expressing and discussing your regrets with other people who are grieving and understand. Eventually, you will be able to forgive yourself and release the troubling memories.

At times, you may feel intensely angry at the person who died or at family members, health professionals, people who have been spared a similar loss, or even at God. Bottling up the anger seldom helps. Expressing and sharing the anger in healthy ways can hasten the healing process.

A loved one's death can challenge your faith or philosophy of life. Questioning your beliefs can be frightening, but it also can deepen and enrich your faith or philosophy.

After the death of your loved one, you may face many practical decisions ranging from disposing of your loved one's belongings to determining your own future. Many people find it helpful to move slowly with these tasks and decisions. If possible, you may want to postpone major decisions for up to a year.

Holidays, anniversaries and birthdays can be very stressful. One way of coping with this stress is to plan these special days carefully. Make sure you have the time and support you need to confront and express the feelings that the holidays raise so you can use these occasions to move your healing process forward.



## Parent's Corner

### TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT DEATH

Often parents ask how to talk to their children about death. Many feel helpless when trying to explain death or they want to protect their children from emotional pain. However, professional experience with children has shown that they are resilient and can work through their grief with time, understanding, and support. Without this opportunity, behavioral and emotional problems may arise, either immediately or in the future.

Just as we encourage you to fully participate in your own healing journey, you can help your children move their grief by following these guidelines.

You are a role model for your children- if you hide your grief, they learn to hide it, too. Instead, set a good example for your children by freely sharing your feelings with them. It is okay for your children to see you angry, upset, crying and relieved. It is important that your anger is displayed in ways that are safe and not scary to your children. You allow them to see what you are really feeling. This gives them permission to express similar feelings. Also remember to let your children know if you don't understand something. They need to know that their emotions and confusion are normal and acceptable.

Tell your children immediately when the death occurs. Gently explain what has happened, what is happening now, and why you are upset or crying.

Explain the death in terms that your children can understand. Use correct terms such as "die," "died," "dying." Words and expressions like, "Sleeping peacefully," "passed away," "departed," "expired," and "lost," only confuse children.

Do not force their feelings of grief. Allow your children to express them naturally in their own way and in their own time. Really listen to what your children are asking or saying. To understand what they are expressing, you may need to ask further questions without making it an interrogation.

Maintain routines as much as possible. It may help your children to remain in familiar places (their rooms, their home) and with familiar loved ones. Even though a death has occurred, your children's lives go on. Your children may need to see or touch the body to help them understand the reality of death.

## Grief's Journey

Saying good-bye is important for children. There are a number of ways that may help them say good-bye:

- Talk to the loved one who has died in their own words.
- Write a letter or draw a picture.
- Place a picture or favorite toy in the casket or in the grave.
- Place flowers on the grave at a later date.
- Complete a project that the children were working on with the loved one before the death occurred.
- Create a memory box to put pictures and treasured items belonging to the deceased, along with poems, writings or journal entries they want to keep.
- Even though a loved one has died, reassure your children that he or she will continue to remember them from pictures and shared family stories.
- Remain open to talking about your loved one and the subject of death in general.
- There is no inappropriate time or place to talk about their questions concerning death and dying.
- It is normal for a child to come to you with an important question about the death or the burial and after receiving the answer, go right out to play. Playing is their way to decrease the stress that they may have about their feelings.

Children tend to "dose" themselves with their grief. This means that they can only absorb and/or deal with the strong feelings that grief generates a little at a time.

Be sensitive to your own feelings and needs. Take care of yourself.