

PARENTS CORNER

Anniversaries and Memory Building

Children grieve periodically over the years and there are times when grief may intensify, such as holidays, school events, birthdays or important family occasions. Anniversaries of the death of a loved one continue to be a special time of grief for children.

Be aware of this time in your children's lives and help them through their grief. Parents and children may find they disagree about what they want to do to recognize the deceased. As much as possible, you should respect the child's individual wishes and allow differences in participation.

Schoolteachers should be alerted to significant times so they may be aware of situations when a child would be sensitive. An example may be a classroom activity where the students make Mother's Day or Father's Day cards.

To help children cope with grief associated with the anniversary, many families visit the cemetery or the place where the ashes were scattered. Other families may prepare a meal or visit a place — park, restaurant or vacation spot — that was special to the person who died. Some families honor their loved one by reading a poem or letter they've written to the deceased.

Your child might enjoy doing a specific activity that they used to do with his or her loved one. Going through scrapbooks and photo albums can be a good way for families to share stories, build memories and correct misinformation about what the deceased was like. It is important for your children to have a place to keep mementos of their loved one such as pictures, special art objects or jewelry.

Anniversaries of the death continue to be a special time of grief for children.

Memory books are a valuable tool for helping children honor their loved one. When creating the book, encourage your children to write down specific information about the person who died, including date of death, how and where the death occurred and the person's favorite song and TV show. Your children may want to draw or write memories

of special times with the person and feelings about their loss. Include special photos of activities they shared with their loved one, too.

Throughout this process, remember that humor, joy and gratitude are also important parts of healing. Give your child permission to express these feelings; learning to honor joyous qualities and memories is an important way to connect with a loved one who has died.

Community resources are available for teens and children who need additional bereavement support. For more information or referrals, contact Sharp HospiceCare Bereavement Services at 1-800-681-9188.



SHARP Hospice
Care

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ISSUE 11

**“Healing from loss often activates a strength we did not know we had.”
— Joan Walsh Anglund**

bringing comfort to each day

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ISSUE 11

Healing Through Grief

Dear Friend,

Healing allows you to be open to new possibilities for the future and find a new enthusiasm for life. Enduring the first year of loss is an accomplishment. As you near the anniversary of your loved one's death, we want to remind you that individuals heal at their own pace; there is no timetable.

This issue of *Healing Through Grief* addresses common reactions and feelings you can expect to experience around the one-year anniversary of your loved one's death. You'll receive recommendations to help you get through special occasions and holidays, as well as suggestions for coping with unexpected bouts of grief.

We're here to help. If you would like to talk about your loss, reactions or concerns, or if you have any questions about our services, please call **1-800-681-9188** to speak to a bereavement counselor.

Sincerely yours,
The Bereavement Department of
Sharp HospiceCare

Coping With Unexpected Surges of Grief

Subsequent temporary upsurges of grief — unanticipated waves of grief that come up at difficult and unexpected times — are common reactions to the loss of a loved one, even years after the death.

Although they may be challenging, these upsurges of grief are normal and healthy responses that can help with the healing process. Memories of your loved one, which may be triggered by birthdays, holidays, songs, a church service, a favorite restaurant or a family reunion, can resurrect grief. The meaning of the reaction is unique for each individual. Some may think that welcoming these feelings signifies that the deceased has not been forgotten. Others may fear that they are regressing or that they will have to experience their acute grief again.

Rather than thinking of your grief as uncommon, acknowledge your feelings as an opportunity to spend time thinking about your loved one. Write about your memories in a journal, create art or music that reminds you of your loved one, or share one of your favorite memories with a family member or friend.



What to Expect Around the One-Year Anniversary

Most people are genuinely surprised by the intensity of the feelings, which typically begin to resurface days or weeks prior to the actual anniversary date.

Like the other phases of grief, your experiences as you approach and encounter the one-year anniversary of your loved one's death will be unique to you, but you may find comfort in learning about common reactions.

It is normal to relive, possibly in vivid detail, the days, weeks or months prior to the death of your loved one. Most people are surprised by the intensity of the feelings, which typically begin to resurface prior to the actual anniversary date. The month leading up to the anniversary is usually filled with anxiety. Nightmares, insomnia and physical complaints such as aches, pains or lack of energy are

common, especially when you're trying to suppress the signs of acute grief.

Although anniversary reactions are painful, they should be taken as an opportunity to release the residual pain of your grief, not as signs of regression. Use this time to reflect on various aspects of the relationship you had, and assess which parts of your grief have been resolved and which require more attention. Give yourself permission to fully experience and express your feelings through tears, writing, art, music, dance, movement or exercise, and try to suspend judgment of your feelings.

Sharp HospiceCare strives to bring comfort to those working through the grieving process. Bereavement counselors provide a supportive, confidential environment for families and friends dealing with the loss of a loved one. To learn more about Sharp HospiceCare, including support groups, call 1-800-681-9188.

Enduring the Anniversary

Tips to help you through the first anniversary of the death of your loved one



1. Anticipate and prepare for the anniversary. For significant days, such as holidays and birthdays, it is better to anticipate the difficulty and plan how you want to spend the day rather than trying to ignore it.
2. Recognize that the time before and immediately after the anniversary may be challenging. The intensification of your pain at anniversary times is temporary; you will regain your equilibrium. Anniversary reactions are not isolated to the first year. In subsequent years, however, the intensity and duration generally decrease. Your experience with the one-year anniversary will help you develop inner resources and external coping strategies to face the days ahead.

3. Honor the memory of your loved one and acknowledge the significance of the anniversary through a special ritual, such as a religious service or flower placement at a special site. You can do this alone or with family members and friends. For example, one bereaved father goes surfing on the anniversary of his son's death. He scatters flowers on the ocean as he paddles out on his board. This allows him to spend some quiet time alone in memory of his son while engaging in an activity that he finds enjoyable. Another widow planned a dinner party and cooked some of her husband's favorite foods. She encouraged her guests to share their cherished memories of her husband.
4. Do something enjoyable that you shared or planned to share with your loved one. For example, one family, whose son died in an accident just before a long-awaited ski weekend, goes skiing each year on the anniversary of his death.
5. Use your journal. Write a letter to the person who has died, expressing how you are doing and where you are in your grief. You may also want to imagine the response to your letter and write it out. Review some of your previous journal entries as a way of affirming your progress.
6. Indulge and nurture yourself. In the days around the anniversary, be gentle with yourself. Limit your expectations and your responsibilities. Engage the coping strategies and nurturing activities that you have found valuable throughout your grief process.

Commemorate Through Ritual

Rituals commemorating your loved one during holidays or special occasions may provide a therapeutic and healing experience to get you through the day, and generate positive and soothing memories to carry with you.

Rituals help you adjust to change, define relationships and provide security and protection. The purpose of a ritual is to give voice and expression to your feelings and thoughts. Rituals should be uniquely designed to target those aspects of your grief that are hindering successful mourning. They may be termed "connection rites," and include such simple activities as mentioning the deceased's name during grace, giving a toast in honor of your loved one, and making a donation or lighting a candle in his or her memory. The expression of love for the relationship with the deceased is what is being acknowledged. It is a healthy way to honor and continue the relationship.

Often people who have not had a funeral or memorial service for their loved ones did not have the opportunity to

say goodbye publicly. You may want to develop a new ritual (no matter how long it has been since the death). It can be symbolic to help you make a new start in life. It may involve expressing some of the statements and feelings that you did not have an opportunity to say or may need to re-say. It may be an opportunity for family members to rekindle pleasant memories through sharing and reminiscing. It may be memory building for children too young to remember who this person was to them.

Rituals can be brief and informal, or may be more formally structured. Overall, it is important for family members to understand they are free to engage in the ritual in any way that feels most comfortable to them — even if that means not participating.



When to Seek Help

Anniversaries are ideal times to evaluate how you're doing. If you feel you need professional assistance, there are resources available to help you cope. If you are unsure, the following list may help you decide whether or not you should seek medical help.

- Your grief has been and continues to be absent
- Your grief is prolonged and acute symptoms persist: lack of energy; limited social interactions; inability to return to normal routine; or feelings of guilt, anger or overwhelming sadness
- In some ways, you continue to act as if your loved one were still alive
- You feel "stuck," as if you are not moving through your grief or making progress
- Others tell you that they think you could benefit from professional help
- You have a history of mental illness or emotional disturbance
- You exhibit dangerous behaviors, including driving fast or recklessly, not taking prescribed medications for ongoing medical problems, spending money irresponsibly, entering into bad relationships, or using alcohol or drugs
- You don't feel it's possible for joy to return to your life
- You experience suicidal thoughts or feelings
- You feel very socially isolated

When you doubt your progress or just have a question, it is best to seek help. Sharp HospiceCare's bereavement counselors offer as much or as little support as you need. If you would like to talk about your loss, reactions or concerns, call 1-800-681-9188.

Your Dream Is Still Inside

Remember where you started,
Travel back there in your mind.
When you hoped for something better,
Something you just had to find.
And so you were a dreamer,
While the best was yet to be.
You lived for your tomorrows,
Your mind and heart were free.
The sweetest part was dreaming,
Looking forward and ahead.
Weaving patterns for the future,
Overlooking fraying thread.
When you've reached back in your maturity,
and you've come up to today,
Do your thoughts reflect and wander,
Are those dreams now in your way?
If you think there are not chances
To be what you wanted then,
and you're trapped with what you've purchased,
Reconsider, think again.
For as long as you can dream it,
you can change and make things right.
And no matter what it's cost so far,
The dream's still worth the fight.
Look toward your inspiration,
The dream won't be denied.
It's waited while you stumbled,
It's always been inside.

— Grover Aaron
In memory of Marianna Aaron