

PARENTS CORNER

A Young Child's Path Through Grief



Behavior Changes

Children may not recognize grief and may not be able to choose how to express it. They may feel strange and act oddly as a result. Restlessness, hyperactivity, tardiness, truancy, academic problems, stealing, fighting and drug use in teens all may be expressions of grief, and may surface soon after the loss, or years later.

Children may need special help beyond what parents can give in order to come to terms with their grief. Consider offering your children special support from another adult — a friend, family member, clergyman or counselor — who can help them work through grief in a healthy way. Behavior problems, like other expressions of grief, will decrease with time.

Delayed Grief

In adults, delayed grief usually results from a failure to feel and express emotions at the time of the loss. While children may express and talk about grief immediately following the death, they may gain cognitive abilities and social experiences as they grow up that allow them to grasp the reality of their loss more fully, resulting in another period of grieving. A transition in children's lives may stir up memories of loss and precipitate new grief.

Children may not recognize grief and may not be able to choose how to express it. They may feel strange and act oddly as a result.

It is important for adults to be sensitive to young children who have experienced a loss of a family member. Seeking professional help is not a sign of weakness for the parent or the child. Instead, it is a sign of determination to help children live to their full potential.

Although everyone's path through grief is unique and individual, there are some typical differences between how children and adults grieve. Children are far more likely to express grief through changes in their behavior. It is more common for them to experience long and intense periods of grief years after the loss. Children are also more inclined to believe they caused the death by something they said or did.

You can help your children cope by listening, watching them play and paying attention to their fantasies. It is also important to answer questions with simple, honest facts using language that is easy to understand.

Guilt and Fantasies

Children may often combine fact and fantasy, gradually learning to discriminate between the two as they grow. When a loved one dies, children often fantasize about the cause of death or illness. They may link their words, thoughts or actions with the death itself.

Be cautious about saying anything to children that might contribute to guilt. This includes using the deceased parent as a source of pressure: "Your father would want you to make good grades."

SHARP Hospice Care

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ISSUE 02

"But if in your thoughts you must measure time into seasons, let each season encircle all the other seasons, and let today embrace the past with remembrance, and the future with longing."

— Kahlil Gibran

bringing comfort to each day

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SHARP Hospice Care

ISSUE 02

Healing Through Grief

Dear Friend,

Although grieving is a natural process, it can be hard work and takes time. If you are having difficulty finding hope for the future and an enthusiasm for life, remember that grief is a necessary healing process that requires you to face disruptive emotions that follow the death of your loved one.

This issue of *Healing Through Grief* emphasizes the importance of finding your own path through grief. Your path is unique to you — your personal pilgrimage through your pain to new hope for the future.

We believe that support can ease your burden by making grief a little less lonely, confusing and frightening. Many grievers find support and comfort in connecting with others who have lost loved ones.

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, call 1-800-681-9188 to speak to a bereavement counselor.

Sincerely yours,
The Bereavement Department of
Sharp HospiceCare

Healing Demands Work

Grieving is a painful process that people naturally resist. The healing process takes work; it demands that you face your feelings to release the pain.

The more fully you grieve in the early months, the more relief you will feel as time goes on. Unfortunately, you cannot reduce your pain by postponing it. And it simply isn't possible to avoid grief without jeopardizing your healing and recovery.

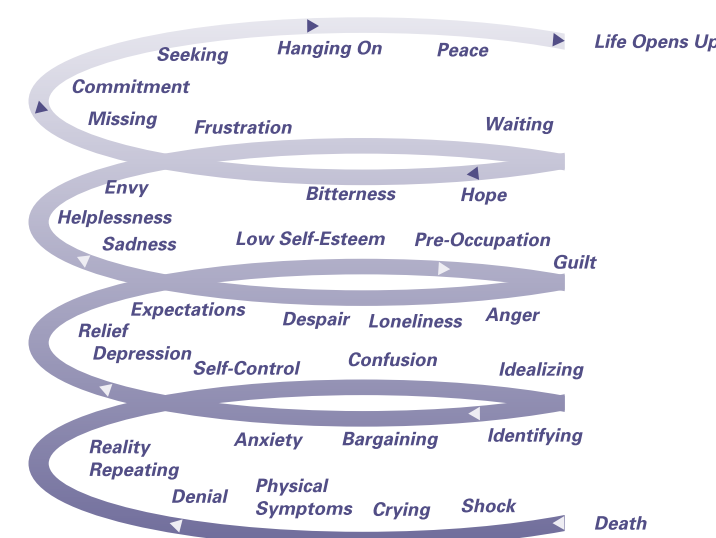
When denied, unresolved feelings can stay with you for many years. They can surface in other ways, including physical symptoms. Instead of resisting what we feel, we need encouragement to learn how to be with our feelings, and release them with trusted friends, family or peer groups.



The Path Through Grief

The path through grief is an individual one and can vary greatly from one loss to the next. An understanding of your experience, expressing your emotions with words, can help you cope. This path offers a picture of many of the common experiences of grief.

Keep in mind that your grief is unique and your personal path may vary from this map. Despite the variances, knowing that others have endured their grief and recovered an interest in life can give you courage as you discover your own path.



Inspired by "Experiences of Grief in Hope for the Bereaved"
— T.S. Schoeneck

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.

Finding the Courage to Reach Out

How often have friends or family members offered, “If you ever need anything, just call”? Your friends and family want to help, but they don’t know how. During this time of transition, we encourage you to proactively find the support you need by letting others know how they can help.

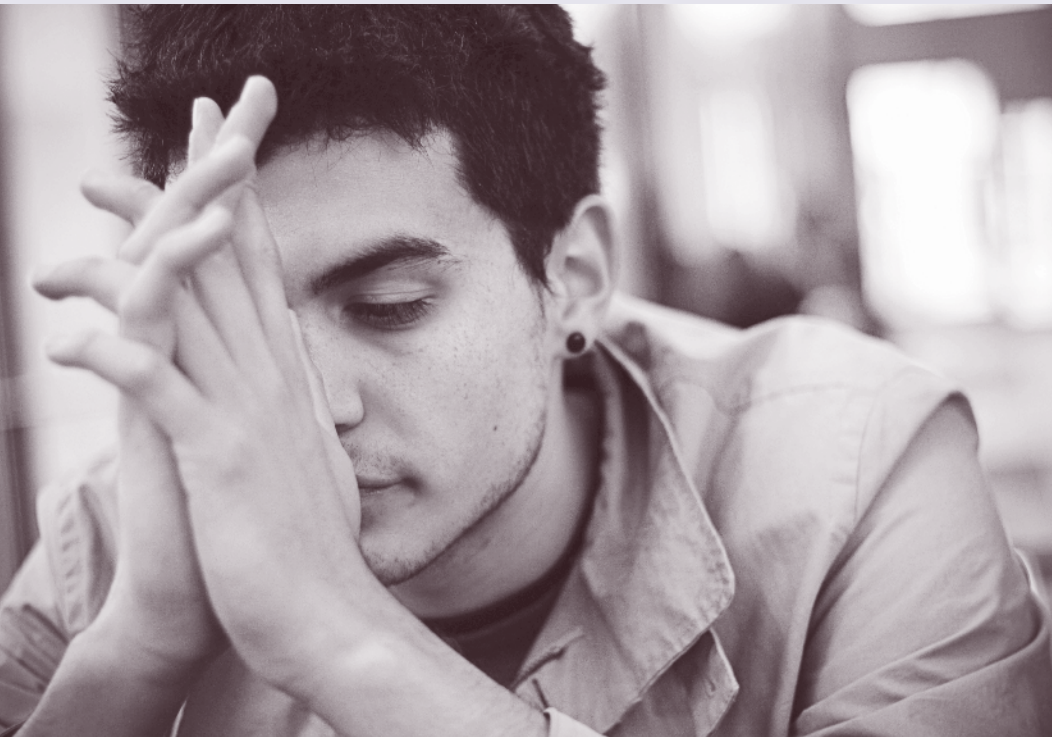
There are many ways to build a support system.

- **Recognize that no one person, no matter how caring or concerned, can meet all of your needs.** Think about how each family member or friend can best help you based on the nature of your relationship to that individual, and how he or she has supported you in the past. Identify the good listeners, and those who are more comfortable with practical tasks like fixing the plumbing or running errands. Know which roles are most appropriate for each person as you build your network of support.
- **Tell people what you need.** This can be a struggle for some people because it requires a willingness to be vulnerable at the risk of appearing weak. Muster your courage, swallow your pride and let others know specifically how they can help.

- **Educate others about grief and share your experience.** In general, people know very little about grief, and though they want to help, they may simply not know how. Explain that grieving is a natural healing process and you need support, companionship or practical assistance during the healing process. Sharing copies of the *Healing Through Grief* newsletters with your family and friends is one way you can help educate them about the grieving process.

Muster your courage, swallow your pride and let others know specifically how they can help.

- **Consider participating in a bereavement counseling group.** Designed to meet the needs of those who are grieving, these groups provide a forum where individuals can express feelings and concerns together in a safe, confidential environment. Professionally trained bereavement counselors facilitate the groups.



The Seasons of Grief

Your journey through grief has phases, like the seasons of the year. As the seasons pass, many people experience similar emotions and reactions to grief. Of course, no two people grieve the same way, but learning about common responses may help you as you find your way.

Season One of Grief

Your disbelief prevents you from accepting what is true; you can’t cry because you don’t believe that you’ve lost a loved one. You expect to wake up any minute from this nightmare.

Shock temporarily helps by softening the blow, leaving you dazed and numb. You go through the motions like a robot and your emotions are frozen.

Sometimes spontaneous crying and other times quiet tears give emotions an outlet. Give yourself time for this physical release.

You may not be surprised by your emotions, but may be unprepared for the physical symptoms that those who grieve often experience. You may sleep or eat too little or too much. You may have physical aches, pains, numbness or weakness. Usually the symptoms fade, but check with a doctor to rule out other causes.

Denial may cause you to separate facts from feelings. While you know the person has died, in your heart you cannot yet accept the death, so you forget. Instead, you imagine your loved one is away for an extended trip, expecting that he or she will call or walk through the door.

You question — why did he or she have to die? You repeatedly ask, yet you don’t expect an answer. Your question is a cry of pain.

You repeat your story over and over again. Repeating helps you absorb the painful reality.

You may need self-control to fulfill your responsibilities, do your job or rest from the pain. Although it can give shape and rhythm to your grief, constant, rigid self-control can block healing and should be moderated.

Season Two of Grief

When reality sets in, you may feel a decline in your healing as you acknowledge the death. Support may diminish as family and friends expect you to improve.



Confusion tampers with your sanity and you may find that you are disorganized and impatient with yourself. You can’t think and you forget your thoughts mid-sentence.

You tend to idealize and remember only good traits of the loved one who died, as if he or she were perfect. You find it hard to accept your living loved ones who are not as perfect.

You identify with your loved one who died. You may copy his or her style of dress, hobbies, interests or habits. You may carry or wear a special object or piece of clothing.

Your anxiety increases and you are frightened of losing control or going crazy. You panic about the future, money or other people who could die.

Sometimes you feel relief. You’ve had a good day and feel better. You can laugh and have fun without feeling guilty. Enjoy these moments when they come; you deserve a rest from your pain.

Your overwhelming sadness may return periodically, sometimes when least expected, which may surprise you because you thought you were better. You may hurt so much you don’t care about anything, and everything becomes an effort.

Your expectations may cause you to feel like you aren’t grieving “correctly.” Your friend was better in a few months, so why aren’t you? It is better not to compare. Your own expectations or that of others may add to your burden.

Like most bereaved people, your self-esteem and self-confidence may temporarily fall far below normal levels.

Often, no matter what you are doing, you may be preoccupied with your loss, thinking of nothing but your loved one.

Your sadness makes you inconsolable. Unhappiness pervades your life and you miss your loved one’s presence desperately.

You may feel intense anger toward yourself, others, your loved one who died or God. You may feel irritated by everyone and everything.

Guilt may result from your anger. You may be tortured by regret. You relive real or imagined mistakes in your relationship with your loved one who died, and feel that no one else understands.

You may feel isolated and lonely, causing the desire to withdraw from family and friends.

Despair from unbearable agony may result. You feel hopeless and don’t want to go on living. You want to be with your loved one.

Your sadness makes you inconsolable. Unhappiness pervades your life and you miss your loved one’s presence desperately.

You may feel helpless and unable to help yourself cope with grief. You feel powerless because you cannot control your feelings.

Seeing other couples together may cause you to envy their love. It makes you feel keenly the loss of your spouse or mate.

Your frustration builds as your fulfilling activities have gone and you haven’t found new ones yet. Nothing interests you.

Temporary feelings of bitterness and resentment are natural, especially toward those who may be, in some way, responsible for your loss. Habitual bitterness, however, can drain energy and block healing.

Season Three of Grief

Life may seem like constant waiting. Your struggle is over, but your zest has not returned and life seems flat. You are in limbo, exhausted and uncertain. The good days begin to outbalance the bad, however, and somewhere inside you struggle to believe you will get better, and you keep hope alive.

You never stop missing your loved one. Particular days, places and activities can bring back the pain as intensely as ever.

You may begin to make a commitment to life. You recognize that healing is a choice and you decide to actively begin building a new life for yourself, taking the initiative to become involved.

Some days you may hang on to your grief; it is familiar and it keeps you close to your loved one. Letting go seems like forgetting, and although you are reluctant to do so, you begin to let go gradually.

Season Four of Grief

Finally, peace comes and you can reminisce about your loved one without reactivating the pain. You feel able to integrate these changes into the new you and face your own future.

Life has value and meaning again. You can enjoy, appreciate and anticipate events. You are willing to let the rest of your life be all it can be.

