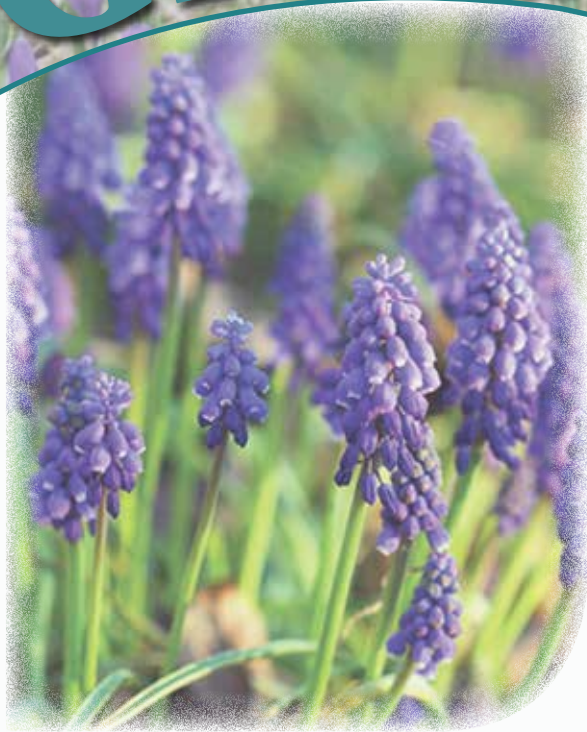


Grief's Journey



The loss of a loved one can affect you emotionally and physically. It can also be a blow to your innermost self – what you may think of as your soul or spirit. Your journey through grief can be a spiritual journey, just as surely as it can be a physical, emotional and social journey.

Our HopeWest families include people of diverse backgrounds and beliefs. Some may be involved with organized religion and others may not. Some may trust in a creator they call God, while others may rely on human reason for living in harmony with nature.

Whatever your beliefs, we invite you to read this month's newsletter, hoping that it may speak to you. This newsletter speaks to the spirit and can help you meet one of grief's greatest challenges; the challenge to grow from and find meaning in the experience of loss.

Hope is an Open Door

A hospice survivor shared this story about visiting her husband's grave nine months after his death; she placed flowers beside the grave and spoke out loud to her husband, acknowledging that he was gone and that they could no longer be together in this world. As she spoke she imagined a large door over the grave which she slowly swung shut. When it had finished closing, a second door appeared alongside it, wide open. A radiant golden light shone through the new door and a voice in her mind spoke, "Now is the time to work on yourself." She left the cemetery full of hope.

When you think about hope, you may think of feelings and anticipation or looking forward to some event. You may think about hope as thoughts that dwell on what you want to happen rather than on what you fear could happen. For those who believe in an innermost self – soul or spirit – you may think about hope as an attitude of the soul.

To hope for things that are likely to happen is easy. To hope for things that are unlikely is more difficult. To hope for things that you cannot even imagine clearly is the most difficult of all. Yet precisely this attitude of hope, which keeps you open

to all possibilities, even those which lie outside probability and your own imagination, can be a discipline of the soul. This attitude of hope keeps you open to the new and able to receive opportunities when they present themselves to your present and future. As the poet Odysseas Elytis says, "What I love is always being born, what I love is beginning always."

Expectations

Having expectations can be a wonderful sign of healing, symbolizing your hope for a future full of imagined dreams. Even being willing to dream again tells you that your healing is progressing. But often you need to examine your expectations: are they realistic or based on how you feel life ought to be?

Life ought to distribute suffering more fairly. Life ought to provide more opportunities to grow through joyous times than through suffering. People you care about ought to be free from their own sorrows when you most need them. If you've led a good and decent life, you shouldn't have to suffer any momentous losses – you should be spared any major hurt in the future. Each of these notions, however, is an unrealistic expectation.

You cannot make life what you want it to be. Life is what it is. Fairness has nothing to do with it. Everyone is vulnerable and needy. When you let go of unrealistic expectations of life you create space for realistic self-renewal. You can actively begin to re-establish goals, relationships with others, and your approach to life. When you are realistic, you will find that you are disillusioned less easily and you are satisfied more often.



Where Is God When We Need Him Most?

When a loved one has died, you may ask, “Where is God?” or “Is there a God?” or “If there is a God, how could He allow such a cruel thing to happen?” You may find great comfort in your faith when you have experienced a death, but others may turn away from God.

Often in your anger against God and others, you may feel shame and guilt as a result of the religious and secular taboos that exist around the expression of these emotions. Remember, suppressing any of your feelings only complicates your grief. Follow the proverb; “Honesty is the best policy.” As soon as you express what is in your heart, something changes. The expression is a desire for reconciliation; love is present and working.

When you have been hurt it is natural to be angry. To heal it is necessary to be real with others and to express your anger. If you deal with God differently, you push Him even farther from your reach. God can take it; He above all knows the pain in your heart. You may be comforted by the words on a poster, “His eye is on the sparrow so I know He watches me.”

Our Relationship with God

In his book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Rabbi Harold Kushner points out that God is a god of justice and not of power. He is there for us even though our misfortunes are none of His doing. Our questions should not be Job’s question, “God, why are you doing this to me?” but rather “God see what is happening to me. Can you help me?”

You can turn to God, not with the expectation of judgment, forgiveness, reward, or punishment but rather for strength and comfort. Kushner shows that God is there to help, as the special protector of the poor, the widow, the orphan, without asking how this tragedy happened in the first place.

You can maintain your own self-respect and sense of goodness without having to feel that God has judged you and condemned you. Recognize that your anger at life’s unfairness and your instinctive compassion at seeing people suffer comes from God who teaches us to be angry at injustice and to feel compassion for the afflicted. Your indignation is God’s anger; when you cry out, you are still on God’s side and He is still on yours.

Religious Faith – A Help or Hazard?

When talking about matters of faith and religion, there are two extremes as they relate to times of major loss. Religion, or the perception of it, can be very helpful or very harmful.

There are many stories about how a faith experience can help you get through your grief journey. Religious beliefs can be a powerful resource, and having the belief that God is near, at your side, can help make the loneliness bearable. Being active in a church routine, believing in an after-life can prevent unhealthy despair. Faith can be a powerful energy when it represents the trust that with work and effort, your grief and sorrow can be worked through.

But religious faith, or perceived faith, can sometimes be a hazard and get in the way of your recovery. If, because of your beliefs, you think that grief should be easier for a believer than a non-believer, then your beliefs are a barrier to your recovery. If you are encouraged to rejoice that your loved one is in heaven and your grief is seen as a sign of a lack of faith, then your beliefs can be a barrier to your recovery for they will hamper the grieving process.

There are times when ministers, priests and rabbis are not trained to know appropriate, healthy grief responses and they may not support a normal, healthy process through grief. Some traditions imply that crying or anger only confirm that you are out of control; these traditions only add to your confusion and guilt. To avoid disillusionment it helps to understand that people in church communities, including the clergy, are human just like you. They may or may not understand the depth of your loss or the pain of your grief and they may not have formal training in the grief and mourning process.

If you have a strong faith you are not excused from the grief process, nor can you expect to get through in a shorter time span. Also, your loss is not a punishment or a test. God has not chosen to take your spouse or willed your child to die; rather He is at your side to comfort you when these tragedies occur. Loss and grief are a part of life for everyone, believers and non-believers. Everyone is subject to the experiences of loss and death. When you have any kind of major loss, you will hurt. Faith can help you have hope – although you are changed forever, you can find meaning and value again in life.



Parent's Corner Building Your Child's Self-Esteem

As parents it is your prime responsibility to foster the development of a positive self-image in your children. Giving your children their futures is the definition of effective parenting at all stages of development.

The loss of a loved one and the grief which results can threaten your own self-esteem and, as a result, your child's self-esteem.

Your path through grief becomes both a challenge and an opportunity for growth and mastery. Meeting that challenge head on means giving yourself and your children permission to grieve. It means experiencing and expressing all of your feelings

and giving your children permission to do the same. Dealing with death constructively, picking up the pieces of your life as a family and moving on courageously, is a major triumph. Consequently, it builds self-esteem through the mastery of a difficult situation.

The following is a list of general guidelines for how to build your children's self-esteem.



- Catch your children doing things right and remind them regularly how terrific they are.
- Provide opportunities for your children to be responsible and to learn how to make decisions as early as possible. Children learn confidence by doing.
- Have a period of quality time each day to give your children 100 percent of your attention.
- Make a clear distinction between the child and the behavior. Avoid saying, "You're a bad boy," but rather, "I don't like the way you're behaving right now."
- Foster your children's independence by encouraging them to try things on their own and letting them know you respect their opinions.
- When your children make mistakes encourage them to see the learning and growth involved. Always praise their attempts whether successful or not.
- Treat each child with respect, honesty and trust.
- Reinforce inner, rather than outer measures of success. Avoid asking, "Did you get an A?" Instead ask, "Do you feel that you did your best?"

- Teach your child enjoyment and gratitude for each day through your own example of finding the positive or the gift in every situation.
- Treat your child the way you would like to have been treated at their age and in their situation.
- Encourage your child to be honest with him/herself and take responsibility for what he/she does or doesn't do, rather than placing blame elsewhere.
- Be aware of abilities and issues at each stage of your child's development so that your expectations and reactions will be appropriate.
- Be aware of the importance of appearance to young people and support their efforts to be as attractive and healthy as possible.
- Tell your children every day that you love them and show it with appropriate physical contact.
- Convey to your child that you believe in him/her and all that he/she can be, treating her as if she already is what he/she is capable of becoming.
- Have fun with your child. Laughing and playing together lets them know that they are fun to be with and you enjoy their company.
- We hope that reviewing these guidelines bolsters your confidence and instills hope that you are an effective parent even though you and your children are grieving.

*There is a light in this world, a healing Spirit
more powerful than any darkness we may encounter.
We sometimes lose sight of the force when there is suffering, too much pain.
Then suddenly, the Spirit will emerge through the lives of ordinary people
who hear a call and answer in extraordinary ways.*

– Mother Teresa

Our Loss History May Impact Our Recovery

Our past losses are likely to impact our current coping. Or more specifically, how we dealt with our past losses, and how we perceived them, may affect our current bereavement outcome. This depends upon when they occurred, whom they involved and how many occurred. Several outcomes are possible: First, a previous loss of a key figure which occurred in childhood could increase the risk of a poor outcome. Second, if the loss occurred in our adulthood it could prepare us for further losses. If one has suffered multiple losses, possible in rapid succession, they could be at higher risk for developing complications in their grieving process. It is most important that this be evaluated individually and that the specific type and timing of the experiences are assessed.

We encourage our bereaved family members to take stock of their previous losses, (which include losses other than death). Because we know that “unfinished business” or unresolved issues from previous losses, may hinder our ability to deal with our current issues, it is paramount to take stock of our history, particularly if we find we are stuck or unable to make progress in working through our current issues.

On the other hand, prior losses can be therapeutic in teaching us what is necessary to cope, what has worked most successfully or not, and they can give us hope that we can withstand the pain of this current loss. For those who have never sustained a prior loss, this can be such a violation of their assumptive world, that they too may be just as overwhelmed as those who have a history of sustaining other losses. One mourner called this, “The curse of too good a childhood.”

Be sure you are in touch with good support whether it is a pastoral counselor, a good friend or a bereavement support program through your church or HopeWest. Often important information can be gained which can ease many of our fears and concerns, even with just one conversation from the appropriate source.

HopeWest provides an array of support groups to help people of all ages cope with the loss of a loved one.

Mending Hearts

Adult support group.

Just for Men

Opportunity to learn about grief.

Angel Babies

Support group for pregnancy and infant loss.

Healing Hearts

Evening grief support group for working professionals or caregivers who can not get away during the day.

Next Steps

Therapeutic grief group focused on reinvesting in life.



**For a complete listing of group meeting times and locations
visit HopeWestCO.org or call (970) 248-8844**



**If you have questions or would like more information,
please contact us at 866-310-8900.**

Grief's Journey

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*Profoundly changing the way our community experiences aging,
serious illness and grief – one family at a time.*