

PATHWAYS TO HEALING

A NEWSLETTER TO AID IN BEREAVEMENT



Spring 2024

Permission to Grieve and Permission to Live

By Michelle Gladu - LMSW, Bereavement Counselor

The death of a loved one is without a doubt one of life's most painful experiences. The jumble of thoughts, feelings and memories that accompany loss can be hard enough to cope with, but often the misconceptions, expectations and judgements that we and others have about grief can make coping even more difficult. In talking with those who have lost a loved one I frequently hear some of the following comments:

I'm grieving wrong: There can be a tendency to think "if only I could figure out the right way to grieve, I would feel better faster. What am I missing?" Others who want to help may say you are grieving "wrong," and if you just follow their advice everything will be better. Those who are grieving can be so vulnerable to self-doubt and the opinions of others when navigating grief. The truth is grief hurts, and it hurts in ways that are similar to others who are grieving, but also in ways that are unique to each of us and our situation. There is no one right way to grieve.

I must be depressed: Grief and depression can feel very similar at times, and can appear similar to those closest to us, but thinking of the natural, normal feelings of loss as an illness can add to the burden of grieving. This tendency is related to the idea that grief should be resolved much more quickly than is realistic. However, if people have had issues with depression, anxiety and other mental health concerns in the past, grief can definitely complicate the picture. If someone is experiencing thoughts of suicide or is unable to take part in daily activities, reaching out to a medical or counseling professional is a must.

I thought I was doing better, but today is a bad day: If you've had some better moments or days since the death of your loved one, and then the clouds roll in again, it can be easy to think that you haven't accomplished anything in grief. "I feel like I'm right back where I started" many will say. The experience of grief can be up and down, a dizzying experience to be sure. In fact, the "back and forth" nature of grief is normal and something that distinguishes it from depression. Don't feel defeated if you hit an inevitable rough patch in grief. Most people notice that the difficult moments and bad days get a little shorter and less frequent over time, and a little easier to manage.

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Feeling guilty: Sometimes when the things that we most want to feel again – joy, laughter, peace of mind – do eventually return they can bring with them a sense of guilt. “I laughed the other day, and then I wondered how I could laugh when my loved one is gone” or “I was having a good time, but felt bad because my loved one couldn’t be here too.” There can also be the fear: “what will other people think?” Reimagining our lives can feel like we are leaving our loved one behind, but is normal and necessary for life after loss. Feeling a sense of relief after caregiving ends is not a betrayal either, but a recognition of the struggle our loved ones went through.

A sense of guilt can work against us in a different way, too: thinking that we shouldn’t grieve because our loved one wouldn’t want us to be sad and would want us to have a good life after they are gone. While this may be true, pressuring ourselves to not have the feelings of loss that naturally occur with the death of a loved one can make grief even harder. Giving yourself permission to grieve well but also permission to live well are important components of coping with loss.



Hospice Grief Support
315-634-1100

Hospice of Central New York and of the Finger Lakes provides support for Hospice families for 13 months following the death of their loved one.

Spring Cleaning

By Joyce Nevola, MSW

Each year the beginning of spring ushers in a season of rebirth and renewal. As the earth tilts closer to the sun daylight lasts longer, snow melts and crocuses bloom in abundance. The age-old tradition of clearing away the cobwebs of winter encourages us to clean out garages, organize our closets, and rid ourselves of excess. For those of us who are grieving, the season can also invite us to turn inward and sort out things that may claim unnecessary storage in our hearts.

After the death of a loved one, a sense of guilt often lingers in our wounded spirit: "I didn't do enough." "I wasn't there." "I shouldn't have said that." "I couldn't stop the pain." Feelings of guilt and regret can deplete our energy and imprison us in the anguish of the past. At times, we may cling to guilt as a way to gain control over what felt like a helpless situation.

In order to relinquish our feelings of guilt, we need to acknowledge them and give them a voice. We need to say them out loud, write them in a notebook, share them with a friend or counselor, or put them in a letter to our loved one. When guilt is expressed, it loses its power and gently leads us to self-forgiveness. Like the earth in spring, this process tilts us toward the light and invites us to grow. Start your spring cleaning today!



In-Person Grief Support Groups

Hospice of Central New York and of the Finger Lakes is pleased to bring back in-person grief support groups for our hospice families and the community. Our groups meet once per week for 6 weeks and are held at our office at 990 Seventh North St. in Liverpool. We will be scheduling additional groups for Fall 2024, so keep an eye on our website at hospicecny.org. You can also call (315) 634-1100 for more information.

Hospice also offers individual and family grief support for the families and other caregivers of our hospice patients for 13 months after the death. Please contact us at (315) 634-1100 for more information.

Finally, our spring Service of Remembrance will be posted on our website later this spring. The services are offered in spring and fall, and families are invited in a separate mailing to contribute a photo of their loved one to be included in the service.



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Articles Inside:

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Please check the Hospice website for information on upcoming support groups and the Spring Service of Remembrance

www.hospicecny.org

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