THE RIGHT WAY TO GRIEVE
By Judy Tatelbaum

One of our misconceptions about the grieving process is that there must be a “right way” to do it. Imagining that there is one correct formula, we may torture ourselves trying to fit into some kind of unreal mold. There isn’t some right way. Grief is an individual experience. There are probably as many responses to pain and loss as there are people in the world.

It is essential that we accept how we ourselves grieve, even if it doesn’t fit our pictures. If we cry uncontrollably, we need to know that’s okay. We may find ourselves angry about our loss or consumed with sadness. Often our grief is a mix of feelings. We may need to be alone more than usual, or we may need the support of a group. Some only share with family. Others of us only share with friends. Our way is our right way.

A problem that can arise is that we tend to expect others to react to loss the same way we do. Stoics assume their intimates will be stoic. Those who cry easily cannot understand why everyone else isn’t crying too. We are uncomfortable with the variety of ways people express their grief. We sometimes feel angry or frustrated because others in our family don’t grieve as we do.

We mistakenly think because we belong in the same family that we should have the same reactions. We don’t. Family members play roles in a crisis. We have “the crying griever,” “the angry griever,” “the silent sufferer,” “the practical planner” and so on. Each of these different roles is part of the whole family experience of loss.

If not understood, these differences can be a source of misery and conflict within a family leaving us feeling lonely and estranged. Couples can feel alienated when they respond to a shared loss with different feelings. Opposing grieving styles can cause serious conflict unless someone intervenes and helps explain these natural differences.

Appreciating differences may be what most helps solidify a family or a couple in a crisis. When my mother was dying, the hospice social worker asked me and my father a profoundly important question: “How do you grieve?” I said I was a “crier.” My father said that he would be “stoic” and not cry until the end. Her second, equally important question was: “Can you tolerate how each other grieves?” When we each answered “yes,” my father and I became a team, a partnership working together to ease and face my mother’s death.

With that wonderful social worker’s help we each owned and appreciated our own unique grieving style, and we began to accept our differences. When I cried, my father understood. I stopped judging his seeming lack of emotions.

To learn to appreciate your family’s different reactions, it might be useful to talk together about how each responds to loss or trouble. To be able to support one another in a crisis like the death of a loved one, we must learn to have appreciation and compassion for our own style as well as the uniqueness of others.
GRIEF SUPPORT

GRIEF COUNSELING SUPPORT
Hospice of Central New York offers a thirteen-month grief support program through The Hospice Grief Center. Our professional bereavement counselors are available by appointment to help families and loved ones through this difficult time.

Services offered for:
- Individuals
- Children
- Couples
- Families

Please call 634-2207 to request services.

ADULT GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP
A group for adults who have experienced the death of a loved one, led by The Hospice Grief Center staff.

Six Mondays:
March 4th – April 8th, 2013
6:00 – 7:15 PM

Topics include:
- Understanding grief
- Reactions to grief
- Adjusting to change
- Remembering well
- Living peacefully with grief

Registration is required, please call 634-2207.

HELP FOR NEW GRIEF
Thursdays, March 21st & April 18th, 2013
6:00-7:00 PM
A monthly meeting for those who have recently experienced a death of a loved one, or for those who would like to know more about their grief and the resources available at The Hospice Grief Center.

Please call at 634-2207 with questions or for additional information. Registration is not required.

WALK-N-TALK GROUP
at
Destiny USA:
Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays
at 9:00 AM

Please call 634-2207 for further information.

PARENTS’ GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP
For parents who have experienced the death of a child of any age.

Six Tuesdays ~ March 5th – April 9th, 2013 ~ 6:00-7:15 PM

Facilitated by Kathy Haley, LSCWR# - Grief Counselor

Space is limited and registration is required; to register or for more information, please call 634-2207.
It is important that the questions posed by children and adolescents are answered in a specific, straightforward, and brief fashion, and reflect the developmental level of the child. Children can usually absorb only bits of information at a time so it is important to pay attention to their cues. Checking to see if a child has understood what has been said is also critical. Adults unsure of the meaning behind a child’s question should probe further by asking what the child meant or knows about the topic. Children often repeat the same questions merely as a way to assimilate the answers. It is also okay for adults to tell the child they do not know the answer to a specific question. Some of the most common questions children ask are the following:

Why did daddy die? It is important to probe further to assess whether they are asking this question because they feel sad, angry, or guilty about the death. If so, it is imperative to allow the child to express those thoughts and feelings. It may also be that they are asking about the physical process of death.

When is mommy coming back? It is okay to tell a child in a gentle loving way that people who die do not come back; that as much as she or he may want mommy to come back, she can’t because she is dead.

Will you die too? It is important when answering this question to give reassurance and support and also to answer honestly. An example would be: “I will die sometime but I hope to be here a long time yet. I do not have any serious illnesses.”

How long will I live? A response might be that no one knows how long they will live, but that no one lives forever. The child should be reassured that most people live until they are old and that many old people are not worried about death.

“Grief and Bereavement in Children” by Robin Fiorelli
HELPING OTHERS, HELPING OURSELVES

Burmese activist Aung San Suu Kyi said once, “If you’re feeling helpless, help someone.” Grief certainly is a time when many feel helpless, not knowing where to go now, or how to help ease the pain of loss. But how can helping others help you cope with grief? A kind act towards someone else can take you outside of grief for a moment and connects you to another human being. Some grievers find being able to help someone gives them a renewed sense of purpose.

Just as each person’s grief is unique, helping others is a personal experience. You might want to start small by being aware of others around you at the store who might need a helping hand with a door or heavy groceries. You might want to make a small contribution to a charity that your loved one cared about.

You might also consider helping on a more regular basis by volunteering. There are many places to volunteer for people of all abilities. When deciding, consider what your interests and skills are and what you can commit to. Not only can these different volunteer opportunities help you give to others, but it’s a chance to meet other volunteers with similar interests. These connections can be very helpful for those feeling isolated with their grief.

A word of caution if your loved one died after a long illness: it’s recommend that you take time before you start volunteering with others with a similar diagnosis. This helps you to fully take advantage of the volunteer role.

Grief is a time of great change and can lead us to question who we are. Gandhi stated “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

Marna Metcalf, MA, Grief Counselor

Hospice of Central New York Families

All counseling and support group services are covered for those whose loved one died in the Hospice of Central New York program in the last 13 months. There is a nominal registration fee for camp and some workshops.

Other Members of the CNY Community

Those who experienced a non-hospice death are offered the following services free of charge: support groups, grief talks and workshops, bi-annual Service of Remembrance, lending library and Pathways newsletter. We ask that each person contribute what they are able for short term counseling.

Hospice of Central New York does not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, color, sexual orientation or religion.
In our grief we may find ourselves asking “Why? Why is there death? Why is there evil? Why is there suffering?”

In a recent editorial Maureen Dowd asked the “unanswerable question” to Rev. Kevin O’Neil who reflected: “We are human and mortal. We will suffer and die. But how we are with one another in that suffering and dying makes all the difference....[Our lives are] lived in family and community. We need one another...[to be present to each other]. Suffering isolates us. A loving presence....brings us back, makes us belong.”

Wendell Barry in his poem “The Peace of Wild Things” speaks of how nature can provide a sense of peace and presence in the face of life’s deepest and most disturbing questions:

When the despair of the world grows in me
and I awake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be,
I lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water,
and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of the wild things
who do not tax their lives
with the forethought of grief.
I come into the presence of the still water.
And I feel above me the day blind stars
waiting for their light.
For a time I rest in the grace of the world,
and I am free.

Courage is not the absence of fear and pain, but the affirmation of life despite fear and pain.

Rabbi Earl Grollman

SAVE THE DATE!

Our Service of Remembrance will be held on April 21, 2013.

Please watch your mailbox for further details and invitation to submit a picture and sentiment.
Calendar of Events

Adult Grief Support Group – March 4 – April 8, 2013
Parents’ Grief Support Group – March 5 – April 9, 2013
Helping Hands, Healing Hearts Children’s Group – March 5 – April 9, 2013
Help for New Grief Group – March 21 and April 18, 2013
Service of Remembrance – April 21, 2013

Check out our website at www.hospicecny.org

Please contact Ellen, Bereavement Office Coordinator, at 634-2207 for further information, or if you would prefer not to receive this publication. Unless otherwise noted, all events are held at Hospice of CNY (fully accessible). Should a program need to be cancelled due to weather or other emergency situation, we will leave a message at 634-1113 x 307 two hours prior to the event.