GRIEF SURVIVAL SKILLS

Here is a list of practical steps that may make grieving more manageable for you. While we often focus on the feeling aspects of mourning, grieving is also about thinking our way through our time of bereavement. Here are some practical tools to help your mind heal your heart. Naturally, they will not take your grief away, but they may help you deal more peacefully and constructively with it.

**Learn about grief** Read, learn and consider what grief is and how it unfolds. Call Hospice for a reading list or borrow materials from your local library.

**Take good care of yourself** You need to help yourself get a basic level of rest, moderate exercise and healthy eating. No one else can do this for you.

**Honor your own timing** Stand firm in the face of other people’s expectations of what should happen “by now”. You will know when the time is right for you to deal with your loved one’s possessions, reconnect with social activities, date and make decisions about your wedding ring.

**Swap thoughts** If you can’t seem to get beyond difficult or painful images, write a list of 5 very vivid, positive memories of your loved one. When you are troubled by a difficult image, set one of your “good memories” next to it in your mind. Acknowledge the trauma but choose what you will remember.

**Build support** Surround yourself with supportive people who allow you to grieve. If you need more or can’t find any, call hospice and ask about grief support programs.

**Use “and” instead of “but”** This tool is helpful when you have feelings that are seemingly at odds with each other. “I miss my mother dearly AND I’m grateful that I am no longer providing 24 hour care.” Don’t paint yourself into a corner with the belief that you can either feel one thing or the other. Your heart is big enough to hold both feelings.

**Say it now** Many people feel there is more to say to their loved one after the death. Some write a letter to their loved one and bury it at the cemetery, some talk aloud or have a “conversation” in the depth of their own hearts. Speak your heart and listen.

**Remember the waves don’t last forever** Use the image of a wave or contractions at childbirth to help you get through the most difficult times with grief. Waves and contractions get bigger and bigger and you aren’t sure if you can stand it, but eventually they wash over you and are gone. Grief is intense, but temporary. You have the resiliency to remain standing.

**Remember the Goal** The goal in grief is to live well and remember well. You do not need to choose one at the expense of the other. You can live well and remember well.

Pat Moriarty, MA, FT
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.

HELP FOR NEW GRIEF
Thursday, September 19th or October 17th 2013
6:00-7:00 PM
- Information about grief
- For those whose loved ones have recently died
- Learn about the Hospice Grief Center

Please call at 634-2207 with questions or for additional information.

Registration is not required.

Doors open at 5:45 PM and group starts promptly at 6:00 PM.

HELPING HANDS, HEALING HEARTS
A 6 week group for children ages 5 – 12
Tuesday evenings, 5:30-6:45 PM
October 22nd – November 26th, 2013

This group will help children:
- Understand the death of their loved one
- Learn skills to cope with and express the feelings of grief
- Know they can be happy while remembering and memorializing

Registration is required; please call 634-2207

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:
September 9th – October 14th, 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.

Doors open at 5:45 PM and group starts promptly at 6:00 PM.
When someone very important in our lives dies, several changes take place that affect memory, concentration and learning. This challenge lasts for months and can last for two or more years. Grief and trauma can be a detriment to learning for children and adults.

Our brains have a massive storage capacity. The only limit is the amount of information that can be processed at any one time (usually 5-6 pieces of information at most). After the death of a loved one, the area in the brain which processes information can be overloaded with thoughts of the deceased and how to manage intense emotions. Little room is left for concentrating on academics, so school can become overwhelming to a child.

On the other hand, some children continue to perform well in school following the death of a significant loved one. These children often go unnoticed. They may use schoolwork or sports to maintain steadiness when dealing with painful feelings and thoughts. Or maybe they find that “doing their job” helps restore their sense of balance, just like adults who find the distraction of work to be healing and helpful. There is no one size fits all.

**How does one help a child balance grief and academics?**

- Maintain routines in school
- Allow make-up opportunities
- Respect the child’s need to grieve
- Avoid telling the child to "Move on" or "Get over it"
- Talk to the school counselor
- Affirm the person, regardless of academic performance
- Be patient and realistic
- Remember that some children continue to have academic difficulties up to 2 years following a death, and sometimes beyond
- Make exceptions for sports participation...sports can help with the healing process
- Communicate with the school to create an emotionally safe classroom
- Recognize that intense grief can resurface at developmental stages, years after a death occurs

**Source:** Children’s Grief Association Newsletter; childgrief.org

Amy VanDusen, MSW
Child and Family Grief Specialist
ARE GRIEF SUPPORT GROUPS HELPFUL?
By Susan Bachorik, MA

Can attending a group help? It is important to share your sorrow because sharing can lighten the burden of grief. Support can come from friends, family, church, community and support groups. Sometimes family and friends want to help but they may not know how. Connecting to others will help you heal.

Grief is highly individualized. How you grieve depends on many factors: your faith, your coping style, your life experiences and the nature of your loss. You may experience all kinds of emotions and you may feel the pain will never go away. Some individuals begin to feel better after a few months and for others it may be longer.

Unfortunately, there are no words that can be said in a group setting that can make grief disappear. But groups are a place to work together with others who are also struggling; it is a place where you can support one another. Information provided in groups can offer new perspectives on the challenging parts of grief. Groups can help to normalize and validate your feelings and provide a safe place to talk about your loved one. Groups can break the cycle of loneliness and boredom of your daily struggle. Finally, sometimes by listening to others you may identify a new way to reduce your feelings of grief.

“Sometimes our light goes out, but is blown again into instant flame by an encounter with another human being.” Albert Schweitzer

Hospice of Central New York Families
Grief services are covered for those whose loved one died in the Hospice of Central New York program in the last 13 months.

Other Members of the CNY Community
Those who experienced a non-hospice death are offered the following services free of charge: grief support groups, 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.
GUILT
By Kathleen Haley, LCSWR#

For many people, guilt can be a difficult part of grief. It’s important to come to terms with guilt so that it doesn’t overwhelm you. As Kathleen O’Hara writes in *A Grief Like No Other*, “at some point, you need to realize that guilt is a feeling, not a reality.” For the parent who feels he should have been able to keep his child well, for the daughter who did everything but felt she should have done more, for the spouse who worried about not being able to “fix this”, O’Hara suggests the following exercises. They provide a way to acknowledge and sort out your feelings.

**Exercise 1:**

**My Guilt Feeling Is**... (Complete the following statements):

I should/shouldn’t have...........
If only I had...........
Why did I ..........?  
Why didn’t I.............?  
Why did I let .................happen?

Now change these statements in this way:

**The Reality Is:**

I did what I thought was best.
I didn’t know...
I can’t change what happened.
I did the best I could.

Each of us has a choice: we can allow ourselves to be weighed down with guilt or we can put it down and let it go.

**Exercise 2:**

Picture yourself struggling to swim in the ocean while carrying an enormous burden. It is so heavy, you feel like you will sink. This weight holds the feelings of guilt over all the things you did or did not do when your loved one was alive. Acknowledge that you will have these feelings, but they do not have to crush you. Release your burden—you do not have to carry this—you can let go. Picture yourself releasing the burden, watching it sink, and swimming away.

Remember O’Hara’s assertion, “at some point, you need to realize that guilt is a feeling, not a reality.”
Calendar of Events

Adult Grief Support Group – September 9 – October 14, 2013
Help for New Grief Group – September 19 or October 17, 2013
Helping Hands, Healing Hearts Children’s Group – October 22- November 26, 2013
Individual or Family Grief Counseling Support – available by appointment
Service of Remembrance – Save the Date – October 27, 2013 – Further details will be mailed

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.