

Expect to have hope rekindled. The dry seasons in life do not last. The spring rains will come again.

~Sara Ban Breathnach

CARING CONNECTIONS

JUNE 2018

Summer is Here!

A new season and another reminder of your loss. Summer can mean gatherings with family at celebrations like graduations or family reunions. Summer also means getting outside into the sunshine and fresh air after being cooped up from our long and snowy winter. If you are gathering with family or friends you didn't see during the winter, you may find yourself telling the story again about the loss of your loved one. This may feel healing to some and to others, it may be difficult to tell the story again about their loved one dying.

For those who are grieving (the internal feelings of loss) and mourning (the outward expression of grief), you may be thrust into a completely new experience feeling like you are without a road map. You may look towards others such as other family members as to "how to grieve or mourn" while those same family members may be turning to you as well for insight into this journey. Some people who are grieving may feel their way of grieving or mourning is "the right way" and may judge others for not grieving or mourning in the same manner. Our grieving is personal and is in correlation to what type of relationship we had with the deceased. Our mourning, the outward expression of our grief, takes many forms as well. Both grieving and mourning may bring you closer to people in your life or it may cause friction. For more information about how families, in particular, grieve you will find an article on page two and three by Martha M. Tousley, a psychiatric nurse.

It is important to remember that how you share your feelings of grief is as personal and individual as you are. The important piece is that your grief is expressed, not bottled up. You do have the choice of how you want to express your grief. You may choose

to share your feelings with a close family member at a summer family function or with close friends or via social media or within a support group or in all of these venues.

For people who are more introverted, your grief may be expressed through writing or through a private ritual. The first step is to find that safe and accepting place to share your feelings of grief. That first step may be the hardest if you are not used to sharing deeply felt feelings in a world where people are busy and no longer live close to one another. Or you, yourself, may be the busy one and finding the time and place may be the difficult first step. Wherever you find yourself, I encourage you to take that first step or several first steps until you do indeed find that safe and accepting place.

Grace Anderson, M. Div, Bereavement Coordinator



Understanding Different Grieving Patterns in Your Family

by Martha M. Tousley, RN, MS, CS

Grief is a family affair. When one member of a family dies, the entire family is affected, as each person grieves their own personal loss in their own unique way. Roles and responsibilities shift; relationships change; communication and mutual support among family members may suffer. Over time, the family must identify what the roles and functions of the lost member were, decide whose job it will be to execute those duties now, and learn how to compensate for their absence.

Men, women and children are very different from one another, not just in personality patterns that affect how they think, feel and behave, but also in how they grieve. When someone dies, they will not experience or express their reactions in the same way. Failure to understand and accept these different ways of grieving can result in hurt feelings and conflict between partners and among family members during a very difficult time.

Personality patterns differ within a family. Differing personality patterns among family members will affect how each one individually expresses, experiences and deals with grief. While we all have the capacity to think and to feel, personality research shows that typically a person trusts and prefers one pattern of response over the other.

Thinkers experience and speak of their grief intellectually and physically. They are most comfortable with seeking accurate information, analyzing facts, making informed decisions and taking

action to solve problems. Remaining strong, dispassionate and detached in the face of powerful emotions, they may speak of their grief in an intellectual way, thus appearing to others as cold and uncaring, or as having no feelings at all.

Feelers experience a full, rich range of emotions in response to grief. Comfortable with strong emotions and tears, they are sensitive to their own feelings and to the feelings of others as well. Since they feel strong emotions so deeply, they're less able to rationalize and intellectualize the pain of grief, and more likely to appear overwhelmed and devastated by it.

Still others may experience profound grief and have very strong feelings about it, but for one reason or another are unable or unwilling to express it. Such individuals are more likely to turn to drugs or alcohol in an effort to numb the pain of loss, or to lower their inhibitions so they can let loose their emotions.

In general, when men suffer the loss of a loved one they tend to put their feelings into action, experiencing their grief physically rather than emotionally. They deal with their loss by focusing on goal-oriented activities which activate thinking, doing and acting. Rather than endlessly talking about or crying over the person who died, for example, a man may throw himself into time-limited tasks such as planting a memorial garden or writing a poem or a eulogy. Such activities give a man not only a sense of potency and accomplishment as he enters his grief, but also a means

of escaping it when the task is done. If a man relates the details of his loss to his closest male friends, it's likely to be around activities like hunting, fishing, sporting events and card games. Although a man may let himself cry in his grief, he'll usually do it alone, in secret or in the dark — which may lead some to conclude that he must not be grieving at all.

Women, on the other hand, have been socialized to be more open with their feelings. They may feel a greater need to talk with others who are comfortable with strong emotions and willing to listen without judgment. Unfortunately, while it may be more acceptable for women in our culture to be expressive and emotional, all too often in grief they're criticized for being too sentimental or overly sensitive.

Children grieve just as deeply as adults, but depending on their cognitive and emotional development, they will experience and express their grief differently from the grownups around them. Their response will depend on the knowledge and skills available to them at the time of the loss. More than anything else, children need their parents to be honest with them. They need accurate, factual information, freedom to ask questions and express their feelings, inclusion in decisions, discussions and family commemorative rituals, stable, consistent attention from their caretakers, and time to explore and come to terms with the meaning of their loss.

Allow for individual differences among family members. The way we grieve is as individual as we are, and our own gender biases may influence how we "read" another gender's grieving. Some females are "thinkers" who grieve in traditionally "masculine" ways, and some males are "feelers" who will grieve in traditionally "feminine" ways. Regardless of differences in personality, gender and age, however, the pressures of grief are still present for all family members, and the tasks of mourning are the same: to confront, endure and work through the emotional effects of the death so the loss can be dealt with successfully. Grief must be expressed and released in order to be resolved, and all family members need encouragement to identify and release emotions, to talk about and share their thoughts, and to accept help and support from others.

Throughout her 35-year career in psychiatric nursing, Martha M. Tousley has practiced individual, marital, family and group psychotherapy in a variety of settings, including schools, hospitals, community mental health centers and in private practice. Over the years she has provided consultation, community education and training on loss and bereavement in Michigan, New Jersey and Arizona. Her latest book, *Finding Your Way through Grief: A Guide for the First Year*, was published by Hospice of the Valley in 1999.

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Grief is an Emotion

Grief is an emotion, not a disease.

There is no time table for recovery.

But there is also no getting around the pain.

Each of us have to experience the pain in order to recover from it.

Our hopes and dreams may no longer be possible.

We may feel hopeless and want to run away.

It takes time and effort to regain the ability to function.

We must express our feelings and be patient with ourselves.

Grief is a process.

Recovery is a decision.

Readjustment does not come overnight.

But each of us can resolve to survive one moment at a time.

Hospice of the Twin Cities
2000 Summer St NE, Suite 100
Minneapolis, MN 55413

(763) 531-2424
(800) 364-2478

hennepinhealthcare.org/hospicegriefsupport

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Support Groups 101

It's common to feel alone or isolated while grieving the loss of a loved one. It may seem that friends or family members aren't able to fully understand what you're going through.

Grief support groups can be a way to connect with others who are struggling with their grief.

You can find many support group options on the Hospice of the Twin Cities website in our Bereavement section. As you browse

the information, here are some things to consider:

Closed vs Open Groups

A closed support group is limited to a pre-determined number of attendees, who commit to attending the group for an agreed upon number of weeks. The same participants attend the group each week until the session is concluded.

An open support group offers regular meetings open to the public. Attendees may join or stop attending at any time. The makeup of attendees at an open support group often changes from week to week.

Location/Time

Is the location and/or meeting time

of the group convenient for you? Will it fit into your routine if you decide to attend regularly?

Finding the Right Fit

It's not unusual for people to attend more than one support group before committing to returning. Finding a facilitator and environment that feels safe and supportive is important. If you don't get that sense while visiting, consider trying a different support group to find one that feels right for you.

Please feel free to contact Grace Anderson at 763-531-2424 or grace.anderson@hcmcd.org for additional support at any time or if you would like to be removed from our mailing list.