



# GUIDEPOSTS THROUGH GRIEF

HELPFUL INFORMATION FOR THE RECENTLY BEREAVED

- Community Care Hospice
- Ohio's Community Mercy Hospice
- Ohio's Hospice at United Church Homes
- Ohio's Hospice LifeCare
- Ohio's Hospice Loving Care
- Ohio's Hospice of Butler & Warren Counties
- Ohio's Hospice of Central Ohio
- Ohio's Hospice of Dayton
- Ohio's Hospice of Fayette County
- Ohio's Hospice of Miami County
- Ohio's Hospice of Morrow County

**"GRIEF IS NOT A DISORDER,  
A DISEASE OR A SIGN  
OF WEAKNESS. IT IS AN  
EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL AND  
SPIRITUAL NECESSITY, THE  
PRICE YOU PAY FOR LOVE.  
THE ONLY CURE FOR GRIEF IS  
TO GRIEVE."**

— Earl Grollman

*The days, weeks and months that follow the death of a loved one can sometimes be surprisingly difficult. Coping with the losses and challenges associated with the death of a loved one can feel akin to being routed miles off the Interstate and into unfamiliar territory without a map. We believe that just as a good map could be quite useful on an unexpected road detour, having a "map" as you enter the territory of grief and loss can be very beneficial as well. While everyone's grief experience will be uniquely personal, knowing what the "territory of loss and grief" looks like can be very reassuring. Much unnecessary suffering can be prevented through accurate information and realistic expectations.*

*The articles that follow are designed to provide you and your family with helpful information about various aspects of the grieving process. Also included is information about grief support services available through our Pathways of Hope grief counseling centers as well as a list of helpful books and internet resources. You will notice that the center insert provides current information about specific grief support or grief education groups as well as information related to upcoming memorial services. Throughout the coming year, you will continue to receive our quarterly newsletter, the "Bridge," which will provide additional information about grief and carry the most current information about groups and other services.*

*Please know that it truly has been our privilege to care for your loved one. It remains our privilege to remain available to you and your family as you make the adjustments and adaptations that will be required in the coming months.*

## INSIDE

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| 2 A Bill of Rights for Grieving People        | 6 Sleeplessness: A Common Concern                    | 12 When to Seek Professional Support                       |
| 3 Grief 101: A Basic Primer                   | 7 The Loneliness of Loss                             | 13 Individual Grief Counseling: What to Expect             |
| 3 Make Self-Care a Priority                   | 8 The Needs of Grieving Children                     | 14 Bereavement Support Groups: Could They Be Right for Me? |
| 4 The Experience of Grief: More Than Feelings | 9 Helping Grieving Children                          | 15 What Others Need to Know                                |
| 5 How We Grieve: Understanding Differences    | 10 Signs of Healing                                  | 15 When Will the Grief Get Easier?                         |
| 5 Setting Appropriate Expectations            | 10 The Cemetery: To Visit or Not to Visit?           | 16 Additional Bereavement Resources                        |
| 6 Planning for Difficult Days                 | 11 Facing the Problem of the "Stuff"                 |  |
|   | 12 Frequently Asked Questions About Pathways of Hope |  |



## A BILL OF RIGHTS FOR GRIEVING PEOPLE

1. You have the right to grieve in your own way and at your own pace. Although grieving people may find many commonalities with one another, no two people grieve in exactly the same way or at the same speed. No one can tell you how you “should” grieve or at what pace.
2. You have the right to whatever grief emotions you are feeling. Sadness, anxiety, anger, confusion, relief and guilt can all be part of the grief experience.
3. You have the right to cry without apologies. We seem to be hard-wired for tears as a way of releasing and expressing pent-up emotions.
4. You have the right to talk about your grief as well as the right not to talk about your grief. Talking can be very healing, but you do have the right to choose what and with whom you want to share.
5. You have the right to treasure your memories, stories and relationship with your loved one.
6. You have the right to be honest when asked about how you are doing.
7. You have the right to take care of yourself and do what is right for you. You can rest, slow down and choose which invitations you want to accept and which you choose to decline.
8. You have the right to do things differently. You can change the furniture around, eat at different times, revise or let go of “traditions” for the time being - or forever.
9. You have the right to laugh and enjoy life. Joy can be present in the midst of sorrow just as sorrow can be present in times of joy and celebration. Allowing your attention to be directed into the moment and away from sorrow does not mean you have forgotten your loved one.
10. You have the right to express, nurture or explore your spirituality. Grief can be a catalyst for spiritual growth. Sometimes loss can leave us questioning our beliefs and assumptions. This process, though at times uncomfortable, may lead you to a deeper and more meaningful spirituality.



## GRIEF 101: A BASIC PRIMER

*Bereavement* means that we are deprived, robbed or stripped of someone or something of high personal value. In other words, it's the objective state of having suffered a loss.

*Grief* refers to our internal and external reactions to loss.

*Mourning* is the way in which we express our grief.

**GRIEF IS A NATURAL RESPONSE TO LOSS** and a normal consequence of our ability to love, connect and live fully. We do not grieve that which isn't important to us. It is the link between loss and moving forward.

**GRIEF IS EXPERIENCED AT MULTIPLE LEVELS.** It affects us physically as well as emotionally and spiritually and impacts our thinking and behavior.

**THERE IS NO ONE RIGHT WAY TO GRIEVE.** Response to loss is highly individual, based on personality, life experience, personal beliefs and expectations, as well as other factors unique to the individual and their relationship with whom or what is lost. Everyone grieves in his or her own way.

**GRIEF CAN BE EXHAUSTING.** The energy that grief requires takes its toll in fatigue, irritability and forgetfulness. Attention to the basics of self-care — health, nutrition, rest and exercise — facilitates the healing process.

**FLUCTUATION IN FEELINGS, ENERGY AND COPING IS TO BE EXPECTED.** The ups and downs are often unpredictable and are a normal part of the grief experience.

**THERE IS NO TIMETABLE FOR GRIEF.** It takes as long as it takes. While the intense pain that often accompanies acute grief may be expected to abate over time, there will always be times when the loss is remembered, missed and grieved.

**CHILDREN DO GRIEVE, ALTHOUGH THEY EXPRESS IT DIFFERENTLY THAN ADULTS.** Their reaction to loss and understanding will differ according to age and development. Age appropriate information about death and grief coupled with sensitive support can help.

**KNOWING THAT THERE ARE WIDE VARIATIONS IN WHAT IS "NORMAL" CAN HELP.** Inaccurate or faulty information about the grieving process leads to unrealistic expectations, which can unnecessarily add to pain and suffering.

**GRIEF IMPACTS NOT ONLY THE INDIVIDUALS DIRECTLY INVOLVED,** but also their social connections and support system. Relationships are changed after loss, and it is normal to reassess, change or even end some relationships.

**GRIEVING PEOPLE SOMETIMES NEED TO LOOK OUTSIDE THEIR USUAL SUPPORT SYSTEM** to find the understanding and information they need. Grief or other support groups, books, internet resources and professional counseling can be of benefit.

## MAKE SELF-CARE A PRIORITY

You may find it difficult to take care of yourself while grieving. Business details to deal with, lack of energy, and lack of desire can present significant challenges to walking positively and deliberately in the early days of grief. Paying attention to the basics of self-care — nutrition, hydration, exercise, rest and social support — is essential.

Strategies that can help in the healing process include:

- Take care of yourself physically. Have a check up with your physician.
- Exercise daily. Even a slow, peaceful walk can help you relax.
- Eat well and wisely.
- Lower expectations of yourself.
- Take one day at a time, one goal at a time.
- Keep a written journal. It doesn't have to be 'professional,' just honest.
- Trust your own sense of timing.
- Participate in pleasant activities you enjoy.
- Seek new routines and interests.
- Discover what you need from others and ask.
- Embrace your spirituality.
- Pamper yourself. A massage can do wonders!
- If possible, avoid making major decisions like moving or changing jobs during the first year of grief.
- Join a support group.
- Don't hold back your tears — crying can be very therapeutic.
- Find ways to hold on to hope.

# THE EXPERIENCE OF GRIEF: MORE THAN FEELINGS

The personal impact of loss can be wide-ranging. Grief is expressed not only through feelings, but also through physical sensations, thoughts or cognitions, changes in behavior. While everyone grieves in their own way, there are some common experiences that many bereaved people normally experience. Although these experiences may be grief related, it is very important the griever have a complete physical exam to rule out other causes of such symptoms.

***“THERE IS SACREDNESS IN TEARS. THEY ARE NOT THE MARK OF WEAKNESS, BUT OF POWER. THEY SPEAK MORE ELOQUENTLY THAN TEN THOUSAND TONGUES. THEY ARE THE MESSENGERS OF OVERWHELMING GRIEF... AND UNSPEAKABLE LOVE.”***

***— Washington Irving***

## What you *may* experience *physically*

- Physical pain
- Physical exhaustion
- Tightness in the throat and/or muscles
- Heaviness or pressure in the chest
- Lack of energy
- Hollowness in the stomach
- Breathlessness
- Heart palpitations
- Weight loss or gain
- Periods of nervousness or even panic
- Hyper-sensitivity to noise
- Digestive disturbances
- Loss of sexual desire or hyper-sexuality
- Susceptibility to physical illnesses

## What you *may* experience *emotionally*

- Shock/numbness
- Denial
- Sadness
- Anger/fear
- Guilt
- Relief
- Anxiety
- Mood swings
- Loneliness

## What you *may* experience *behaviorally*

- Tearfulness
- Sleep disturbances
- Appetite changes
- Restlessness
- Withdrawal/isolation
- Vivid dreams of loved ones
- Searching
- Avoiding reminders of loved one
- Procrastination
- Desire to run away or become very busy to avoid the pain of loss

## What you *may* experience *cognitively*

- Forgetfulness
- Losing things
- Confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Auditory/visual hallucinations
- Difficulty processing information
- Fearing losing control
- Recurring memories

## What you *may* experience *spiritually*

- Search for meaning
- Crisis of faith
- Confirmation of faith
- Anger at God
- Concerns about afterlife
- Guilt/forgiveness

## SETTING APPROPRIATE EXPECTATIONS

Each person's journey through grief is unique, personal and painful. In an effort to "speed up" the grief process, many griever's will put unnecessary pressure and expectations on themselves. Others may add additional pressure, mistakenly assuming that the bereaved "should" be further along in their grief. Appropriate expectations, such as the following, can normalize the grief journey and help in the healing process.

Your grief will take longer than most people think.

Your grief will take more energy than you would have ever imagined.

Your grief will involve many changes and be continually developing.

Your grief will depend upon how you perceive the loss.

You will grieve for many things both symbolic and tangible, not just the death alone.

You will grieve for what you have lost already and for what you have lost for the future.

Your grief will entail mourning not only for the actual person you lost but also for all of the hopes dreams and unfulfilled expectations you held for and with that person, and for the needs that will go unmet because of the death.

The loss will resurrect old issues, feelings and unresolved conflicts from the past.

You will have some identity confusion as a result of this major loss and the fact that you are experiencing reactions that may be quite different than what you expected.

You may have a lack of self-concern.

You may experience grief spasms, acute upsurges of grief that occur suddenly with no warning.

You may feel as if you are going crazy. You may be obsessed with the death and preoccupied with the deceased.

You may find yourself acting socially in ways that are different than before. You may find that there are certain dates, events and stimuli that bring upsurges in grief.

Others will have unrealistic expectations about your mourning and may respond inappropriately to you.

Certain experiences later in life may temporarily resurrect intense grief.

## HOW WE GRIEVE: UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCES

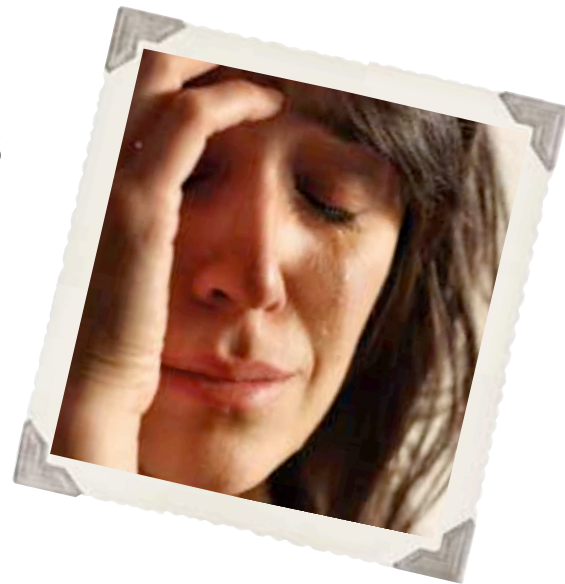
How do we know how deeply someone is grieving? Because not everyone grieves in the same way, it is sometimes difficult to understand a grieving heart, especially when the more obvious emotional signs of grief seem to be absent. If we assume that grief always presents itself in certain ways, we may incorrectly assume that the absence of particular behaviors indicates an absence of grief or a lack of feeling.

How a particular person grieves is determined by a host of factors specific to that individual. Prior experiences with loss, age, gender, coping abilities, spiritual belief system and cultural conditioning are but a few of the many factors that influence how any one person will react to the loss of a loved one. Those individual factors are as unique as our fingerprints, so it should come as no surprise that grieving individuals may appear very dissimilar in how they respond to loss.

Experience and research with bereaved individuals suggests that there are two general styles of grieving. For individuals who are INTUITIVE grievers, grief is an openly emotional experience. These people may struggle with emotions that always seem too close to the surface; they are open to talking about their loss and physically appear to be saddened and de-energized. INSTRUMENTAL grievers are people who process their loss through activity, and thinking through their loss experience. They often feel as emotionally wounded as their intuitive counterparts, but their pain is much less obvious to the casual observer.

These styles exist along a continuum. Most of us lean toward one pole or the other of the continuum with very few individuals relying completely on one or the other style. In any given family you are likely to see both styles of grieving—one sibling may require

physical comforting and lots of interpersonal support, while another sibling may cope by taking charge of tasks related to the loss and appear reticent to acknowledge their feelings. Neither style is "better" than the other. When we can recognize and respect the differences, we are better able to support one another through the territory of loss.



## PLANNING FOR DIFFICULT DAYS

The first year following the death of a loved one is full of “firsts” involving birthdays, anniversaries, holidays and other special occasions. Memories of past times stand in stark contrast to the present. Facing these “firsts” without a loved one predictably heightens awareness of loss and feelings of grief and anxiety. For many, the anxiety associated with anticipation of the upcoming “first” turns out to be worse than the experience itself.

By recognizing that certain days can be difficult and planning ahead, you can make a choice to live with your grief rather than be consumed by it. First of all, acknowledge the day and its special meaning and special memories. Give yourself permission to be sad — leaning into grief can be less exhausting than trying to avoid it.

Many have found it helpful to plan an

activity that acknowledges the loss and honors your loved one’s memory. Lighting a remembrance candle, releasing balloons, visiting the cemetery, printing a memorial in the newspaper, planting a tree or other plant, wearing something that belonged to your loved one or writing a letter are but a few of the options you might choose.

Some find that planning a trip to a new and different place or planning activities that are different from what was done in the past can be a good choice.

Have faith in your decision-making and trust your feelings. You can rest assured that

your loved one will continue to influence you for the rest of your life. Acknowledging and experiencing the special “difficult” days honors their memory and your enduring love.



## SLEEPLESSNESS: A COMMON CONCERN

Problems with sleep are commonly an issue during the early stages of grief. You may have trouble falling asleep or may awaken frequently in the night, unable to fall back to sleep. These problems often resolve as the grief process progresses. But lack of sleep can cause a multitude of challenges. Grief, in itself, is exhausting and emotions and decision-making are more difficult when sleeplessness and physical fatigue are present. If you have persistent insomnia, a complete physical exam is probably a good idea. In some cases, your physician may prescribe medication temporarily to help you sleep. But the following strategies may also prove to be helpful:

- Try to keep to a sleep schedule — go to bed and get up at the same time every day to help set healthy body rhythms.
- If you have trouble getting your mind to “shut down,” play relaxing music.
- Avoid smoking or drinking caffeine several hours prior to bedtime.
- Avoid the stimulation of exercise within two hours of bedtime, but do find some time during the day to exercise.
- Avoid stressful conversations or decision-making before bedtime.
- Don’t go to bed “overstuffed.”
- Practice simple relaxation techniques and start winding down at least one hour before bed.
- Ban anything stressful!

Continued sleep problems may be an indication of underlying grief issues that are not being handled in a healthy manner. Speaking with a bereavement counselor or attending a support group may assist in putting you on the path to a healthy grief journey.



# THE LONELINESS OF LOSS

Loneliness is an integral part of grief. Someone very precious has been lost and the companionship, comfort and purpose they provided are suddenly gone, replaced by a sense of emptiness and aloneness. In the beginning, the loneliness may not be quite as noticeable when supporters are still providing the “Three C’s”: Calls, Cards and Casseroles. But as time goes on, longing for your loved one and the resulting loneliness may grow very heavy indeed.

Loneliness is part of the transition from the past to the future. The ending of the previous life with your loved one forces you into a “new normal” and also new beginnings. But until that new life fully develops, clinging to endings is natural and may be filled with loneliness.

How does one cope with the loneliness? In learning to be alone, there is not one “right” plan. However, there are several guidelines which might prove helpful.

- A first step is accepting that you will feel lonely. You miss your loved one and long for things to be the same once again. Acknowledge the loneliness as being a natural part of the grief process.

- A second step is to reach out. Reaching out is a good cure for loneliness. It will probably be difficult, as the loss of a loved one leaves us drained and often feeling insecure about ourselves. Many bereaved individuals report great satisfaction in volunteering, taking classes, or renewing old or forming new friendships.

- Joining a grief support group is a great way to connect with others in a meaningful way. Grief often makes one feel alienated from others as they feel “no one could possibly feel as I do.” Gathering with others experiencing similar losses provides a safe environment to express your deepest feelings and concerns. It also gives an opportunity to comfort others.

- Understand that there is a difference between being alone and being lonely. Most of us need some time to ourselves to recharge and renew. Time alone is often a necessary part of the adjustment process. Learning to distinguish the difference between the experience of being alone and the experience of loneliness can help you identify appropriate coping tools.



***“THE RISK OF LOVE IS LOSS, AND THE PRICE OF LOSS IS GRIEF — BUT THE PAIN OF GRIEF IS ONLY A SHADOW WHEN COMPARED WITH THE PAIN OF NEVER RISKING LOVE.”***

***— Hilary Stanton Zunin***

# THE NEEDS OF GRIEVING CHILDREN

The grief of children can be painful to observe, often leaving adults feeling lost for ways to help. Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D., a noted expert in grief, discusses mourning needs for children who have suffered a significant loss. Recognizing and supporting these mourning needs can help children heal through their journey of grief.

## **THE FIRST MOURNING NEED IS TO ACCEPT THE DEATH.**

It's difficult for any child to accept that their loved one is gone and that their life will be forever changed. Children may try to imagine that the loss never really happened; this is OK and perfectly normal. Children are likely to revisit their loss at various points in their development due to changing and maturing cognitive and social skills. Eventually, with time and support from trusting adults in their life, children will learn to accept the reality and finality of difficult loss.

## **THE SECOND MOURNING NEED IS TO FEEL THE SADNESS.**

Children do not have to feel sad all the time because, quite frankly, it isn't very much fun to feel sad. Children should be allowed and encouraged to have fun and feel good. Adults should be aware that children process difficult feelings differently than adults and what looks like "play" and fantasy may, in fact, be the means by which children express and cope with feelings of grief. Caring adults need to make themselves available to children when they do have their sad moments and give them permission to express their sadness.

## **THE THIRD MOURNING NEED IS TO REMEMBER THE PERSON WHO DIED.**

Adults need to encourage children to talk about the person who died, share memories, and look at pictures.

## **THE FOURTH MOURNING NEED HAS TO DO WITH HELPING CHILDREN ACCEPT THAT THEIR LIFE IS DIFFERENT NOW.**

Loss changes children's lives as well as their families. Children need to know that they are safe and will be cared for, despite the changes. While life will never be the same again, it is important children understand that doesn't mean that they will never be happy again.

## **THE FIFTH MOURNING NEED ENCOURAGES CHILDREN TO THINK ABOUT "WHY" THIS LOSS HAPPENED.**

This is a very difficult question to answer, especially for a child. Lacking information and life experience, children too often come to damaging "explanations" and conclusions based on misinformation and conjecture. Children should be encouraged to talk to a trusted adult about the "whys" in life.

## **THE SIXTH MOURNING NEED INVOLVES ALLOWING OTHERS TO HELP THE CHILD WHO HAS SUFFERED A LOSS; NOW AND ALWAYS!**

It's important for children to have adults in their lives that they can trust and who are always there for them — no matter what. The process of grief is hard work, which is why it's important to assure the consistent availability of supportive people who can help during difficult times. Children should know that it is OK to ask for help.



*"GRIEVING IS A JOURNEY THAT TEACHES US HOW TO LOVE IN A NEW WAY NOW THAT OUR LOVED ONE IS NO LONGER WITH US. CONSCIOUSLY REMEMBERING THOSE WHO HAVE DIED IS THE KEY THAT OPENS THE HEARTS THAT ALLOWS US TO LOVE THEM IN NEW WAYS."*

— Tom Attig, The Heart of Grief



# HELPING GRIEVING CHILDREN

Children and teens often feel alone and isolated with their grief. Many feel sorrow, sadness, anger, confusion and longing for their loved one while at the same time struggling to make the many necessary adjustments caused by the loss. Sometimes children and teens are hesitant to show their feelings to other family members because “I do not want to upset them or make them cry.” Caregiving adults, in the throes of their own grief, may find it difficult to know how to best support their children. Children, sensitive to the pain of their caregivers, may give the false appearance that they are relatively unaffected and may actively avoid acknowledging how deeply they are affected by their loss. Sensitivity about being viewed as “different” can prevent them from feeling comfortable in sharing their experience or expressing feelings with their friends.

Pathways of Hope offers a variety of services designed specifically to support grieving children and teens.

**INDIVIDUAL GRIEF COUNSELING** provides a safe environment where children can express their thoughts and feelings about the loss. Grief counseling sessions may include grief-related art therapy activities. Art activities provide a non-threatening, creative and enjoyable avenue that opens up expression of thoughts and feelings about the death and insights into how they are coping. One of the powerful qualities of art making is that it does not rely on words to communicate difficult feelings and experiences. This quality makes it especially healing for children and teens, many of whom may not have the vocabulary to express their feelings and experiences in words or are

often uncomfortable talking about their grief. One does not need to be artistically gifted to benefit. Art activities can also provide a creative way to make objects that help maintain cherished memories as well as honor the life of their loved one. The completed project provides the parent(s) or guardian an object that is like a “window to the soul,” facilitating better understanding of and support for their child.

**CAMPS AND MINI-CAMPS** provide bereaved children and teens a fun-filled camp experience with other children and teens



who have suffered similar losses. Bereavement camp experiences can help children learn new coping strategies and connect with other kids who have experienced loss. Opportunities range from Mini-Camp, day camp and overnight camp experiences. All offer traditional camp activities such as swimming, hiking, crafts and opportunities for grief support that are customized to kids. Mini-Camps are one-day programs that provide a mix of fun coupled with grief support for children and teens. Information is available by contacting your local Pathways of Hope services.



## HEALING PATHWAYS SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMS

bring grief support to the school setting. Partnering with area schools, Healing Pathways serves grieving children in their school community, providing grief support groups and other bereavement services to students impacted by loss. If you would like your child's school to institute on-site grief support, please contact us and we will work with school administrators to explore the feasibility of Healing Pathways programming at your child's school.



## SIGNS OF HEALING

Grieving people are often fearful that the intense pain of early grief will never abate. Pain, whether emotional or physical, focuses attention on itself, causing us to overlook the signs that healing is proceeding, despite the presence of pain and sorrow. Like the “hidden pictures” in a child’s puzzle book, when you know what to look for, it becomes easy to see what was right in front of your eyes. A few of these signs include:

- You realize that the time spent crying is decreasing.
- You become aware that your physical energy is slowly returning.
- You recognize that you can remember what you just read.
- You can concentrate on something other than your loved one for longer periods of time.
- Your appetite starts to return.
- You can laugh at a good joke.
- You realize that you are sleeping a little better.



- You feel comforted by sharing memories with others.
- You realize that you are no longer crying every time you hear or speak your loved one’s name.
- You can reach out to help another person.
- You feel less need to visit the cemetery.
- You notice a decrease in the feelings of fear and anxiety.
- You recognize that you don’t have to hold on to the pain as a way of staying emotionally connected to your loved one.
- You can experience a memory that warms your heart.
- You are able to take pride in your success at meeting new challenges.
- You are more willing to visit the grave site when it had previously been too hard to go.
- You can forget the loss for a short time without feeling as if you are betraying your loved one.
- You can enjoy the small pleasures of life — a sunny day, a beautiful sunset or time with friends or family, without feeling guilty.
- You begin looking forward to future events and plans for the future.

## THE CEMETERY: TO VISIT OR NOT TO VISIT?

Once the funeral is over and their loved one is laid to rest, grieving people often find themselves struggling with guilt and other uncomfortable feelings related to cemetery visitation. There are no set “rules” about how to handle this aspect of loss. People differ widely in how they cope with this as well as the other challenges of grief.

For some people, frequent or even daily trips to the gravesite are an important part of their healing process. As the acute symptoms of grief begin to abate, the need for daily or weekly visits may decline, to be replaced by more flexible patterns of visitation.

For many others, visiting the cemetery provides no solace. It is not at all uncommon for grieving people to avoid revisiting the gravesite for some time after the funeral. When ready, the first visit to the cemetery after the funeral can be an important milestone in their grief recovery.

For others, visiting the cemetery brings neither comfort nor aching pain, but rather a sense of emptiness. For these people, the cemetery may serve more as a site where a life lived is permanently recognized and memorialized rather than a place of emotional or physical connection to a deceased loved one.

It is important to remember that visitation practices are in no way reflective of the intensity of someone’s grief or the love and respect accorded to the deceased. Respecting and supporting the different needs, views and preferences of ourselves and others in the grief process is the key.



## FACING THE PROBLEM OF THE “STUFF”

***WHEN AND HOW YOU  
MEET THE CHALLENGE  
OF “HOLDING ON WHILE  
LETTING GO” WILL BE  
INFLUENCED BY THE TYPE  
OF PERSON YOU ARE AND  
YOUR OWN PERSONAL  
GRIEF EXPERIENCE.***

As we move through life, most of us collect an array of personal possessions and “treasures” that link us to fond memories and our personal histories. Wedding rings, photos, mementos and souvenirs are all examples of “linking objects” that ground us in our past while making it psychologically safer to move into the future.

One of the most difficult tasks facing bereaved survivors involves deciding what to do with the deceased loved one’s clothing and personal possessions. Unfortunately, the bereaved often feel pressured by others to dispose of these very personal belongings before they are ready. The unsolicited offer of help to “clean out the closets” carries with it the message that grief can be “cured” by eliminating the physical reminders of a loved one. Attempts to quickly erase personal reminders of a precious relationship cannot heal the empty void created by a death.

Part of the healing process involves making decisions about what is important to retain and what no longer is needed or wanted. Learning how and when to “hold on while letting go” is an integral part of the healing process. Decisions that are made under the cloud of fresh grief are too often cause for later regrets.

One helpful strategy for deciding what to hold on to and what to let go of involves the use of three sorting “piles” — what you definitely do want to keep, what you definitely do not want to keep, and what you’re not sure about. Box or bag up what you don’t want and either pass it on to others or to a charity that accepts used goods. Some things you may simply want to discard to the trash. Expect that on the first go-round you are likely to find a lot that you just aren’t sure about. That’s fine — just box it up and pack it away for a few months and then repeat the process.

For many people, letting go of personal effects is a gradual process, most easily handled in stages. One widower decided that he could start by donating his wife’s socks to a homeless shelter. “I know that socks are desperately needed and besides, I’m not too attached to her socks” was the equation that it made possible for him to start the process of deciding what to hold onto and what to let go of. As he continued his donations over a period of months, he found comfort in knowing that his wife was continuing to make a difference in the lives of those in need.

For some, identifying the clothing that is connected to the most cherished memories is a starting point. One woman found great comfort in wearing her mother’s coat — “It has helped me to imagine I was wrapped in her arms as I went through the hard times that followed her death.”

Choosing favorite pieces of clothing to save or to convert into coverlets, quilts, throw pillows or teddy bears is a comforting option for many. For some, the creation of memory boxes filled with treasured mementos can be of value. One widow had Santa Claus dolls created for each of her children and herself by a talented artisan, who fashioned beautiful keepsakes out of the clothing of the deceased and small mementos such as cuff-links, fishing lures and other personally meaningful items.

As with all aspects of grief, there is no timetable or one “right” way that suits everyone. When and how you meet the challenge of “holding on while letting go” will be influenced by the type of person you are and your own personal grief experience.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PATHWAYS OF HOPE

## **Q: WHAT IS PATHWAYS OF HOPE?**

**A:** Pathways of Hope is the grief counseling service for all Ohio's Hospice patients, families and friends, as well as those in our communities who are anticipating or have suffered the loss of a loved one. Our mission is to offer bereavement support, information and education to bereaved individuals and families.

## **Q: WHO CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF PATHWAYS OF HOPE SERVICES?**

**A:** Pathways of Hope services are offered to all who are bereaved in our communities, regardless of whether Ohio's Hospice services have been used.

## **Q: DO YOU PROVIDE SERVICES TO PEOPLE WHO ARE DEALING WITH LIFE-LIMITING ILLNESS?**

**A:** Yes, grief support services are available to individuals and families facing the challenges of a life-limiting illness.

## **Q: WHERE ARE YOU LOCATED?**

**A:** Pathways of Hope services are available from all Ohio's Hospice affiliate locations and in sites throughout the communities we serve. Please call for current information.

## **Q: ARE COUNSELING SERVICES PROVIDED BY STAFF OR VOLUNTEERS?**

**A:** Pathways of Hope counseling staff members are professionally trained and licensed social workers or professional counselors, with additional training and expertise related to grief and loss. Trained volunteers serve in other roles within Pathways of Hope, but not as counselors.

## **Q: HOW MUCH DO YOU CHARGE FOR YOUR GRIEF COUNSELING SERVICES AT PATHWAYS OF HOPE?**

**A:** Most Pathways of Hope grief counseling services are offered without charge. Although we do charge a nominal registration fee for some camp programs, financial aid is always available in situations of hardship. The costs of our services are supported through the generosity of community donors. While not expected, donations are always gratefully accepted to offset the costs of materials and services.

## WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Although normal grief can be a painful process that at times feels like an emotional roller coaster, there are times when professional grief support may be needed. Some of the "red flags" that signal the need for professional support include:

- You feel "stuck" and unable to see any change in either the intensity of your grief or progress in adjusting to your altered circumstance.
- You find yourself using alcohol, medication or other drugs to cope.
- You have active suicidal thoughts.
- Your physical health is being impacted by your grief.
- You feel overwhelmed or immobilized by the demands of daily life.
- You continue to struggle with accepting the reality of your loss.
- You are plagued by feelings of guilt and remorse.
- You feel isolated with no one to turn to.
- You feel hopeless about the future.
- Even though sufficient time has

lapsed, you are unable to feel interest or joy in other things or other people.

- You are plagued by distressing memories or disturbing thoughts.
- You feel anxious and worried much of the time.
- Anger and bitterness related to the death are impacting your relationships with others.
- You feel like you are falling apart or your life is spiraling out of control.
- You find yourself engaging in behaviors that are not good for you.
- Others express concern for you and encourage you to seek professional assistance.
- You think you need professional help.

**A call to Pathways of Hope will link you to caring, compassionate support, whether your concerns are for yourself or for someone else you love.**

# INDIVIDUAL GRIEF COUNSELING: WHAT TO EXPECT

Meeting with a grief counselor individually is the recommended choice when the loss is very recent, or when grief feels overwhelming, unmanageable or interferes significantly with the ability to manage day-to-day responsibilities. Uncertainty and misconceptions about counseling services can create unnecessary barriers for many who might benefit from talking out their concerns in a confidential setting with a professional bereavement counselor. Knowing what to expect can dissipate unnecessary anxiety and make the process more comfortable and predictable from the beginning.

At Pathways of Hope, grief counseling is a straightforward process. Thanks to the generosity of community donors, our counseling services are offered without charge, thus eliminating financial obstacles and concerns about insurance coverage.

When you call to make your first appointment with a Pathways of Hope grief counselor, you will be offered your choice of several appointment times. If you are seeking services for a child or teen, you will be asked to meet with the child's grief counselor prior to the child's first appointment. We will ask that you complete some routine paperwork prior to your first meeting in order to minimize the time spent in the first session gathering basic information and attending to routine administrative tasks. We may mail you the required forms or ask that you come a bit early to complete them prior to your appointment time.

During your first counseling session, your bereavement counselor will spend a few minutes reviewing your information with you and the rest of the time will be spent exploring your concerns and answering any questions you may have. Your counselor will work with you to identify your personal goals for counseling as well as a plan of action designed to meet your goals

and personal needs. This plan may involve a few more sessions, education about what to expect in the grieving process, guidance regarding helpful grief resources, suggestions related to coping strategies, "homework" assignments or possibly referrals to specialized community services. In some cases, particularly for those involving children or teens, art therapy techniques may be recommended as a means of working toward counseling goals. Most people are pleasantly surprised to discover that a lot of progress can be made in just a few hour-long sessions. Many will then make the transition to a grief group for ongoing support. In the event that long-term or specialized services are recommended, your counselor will work with you to locate appropriate resources.



*YOUR COUNSELOR WILL  
WORK WITH YOU TO  
IDENTIFY YOUR GOALS FOR  
COUNSELING AS WELL AS  
A PLAN OF ACTION  
DESIGNED TO MEET YOUR  
GOALS AND NEEDS.*

## BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUPS: COULD THEY BE RIGHT FOR ME?

Grief support groups offer bereaved persons opportunities to find comfort, hope and healing in a safe and supportive group environment. Meeting with others who are facing similar challenges can provide an effective alternative to relying solely on friends and family for emotional support. When people hesitate to avail themselves of grief support services, their hesitation often centers on questions such as:

- What will the group be like?
- What if I don't feel comfortable about sharing?
- Will anyone in the group really understand what I'm going through?

The decision to attend a grief support group often feels like a big step. Feeling a bit anxious and nervous about being a "first timer" is quite normal. It may help to know that every member of the group recognizes the courage it takes to reach out for support when you are hurting. You will also discover that although the group will be very interested in hearing about your loss and concerns, they will leave it up to you to decide what and when you want to share. Discovering that the group is a place where you don't have to pretend that everything is OK can bring a real sense of relief. As for worries about tears, everyone in the group knows that tears are a normal part of grief. You won't be the first or last person to need a tissue or two to dry your eyes. There is plenty of understanding to go with our supply of tissues.

If you are wondering whether one of our grief support groups might be right for you, it may be helpful to know what participants have said when asked for feedback about their group experience. The following comments are typical:

- "It helps so much to be able to share my grief and have others listen and understand."
- "The time spent listening to others has been very helpful."
- "It really helps to know I am not the only person going through this."
- "Knowing that my grief is shared with others and they understand better than most really helps."
- "I am so glad I finally decided to come."

All of our support groups are open to anyone in the community who is coping with the loss of a loved one. It is strongly recommended that you wait two to three months after your loss to attend a support group. When loss is fresh and pain close to the surface, the pain of others may feel overwhelming — individual counseling, rather than group, is the recommended choice for support early on. Some groups require no pre-registration or commitment for a set number of sessions; it's up to you how frequently you choose to attend. Other groups may require pre-registration and a commitment to a set number of sessions.





## WHAT OTHERS NEED TO KNOW...

### PLEASE DO!

- Listen 80 percent of the time and talk 20 percent of the time.
- Allow the mourner to talk about their loss.
- Accept their tears.
- Talk about your losses and what helped you adapt.
- Use appropriate physical contact.
- Be patient with the griever's story.
- Use the deceased's name.
- Offer specific help.

### PLEASE DON'T!

- Force the mourner to put on a happy face by saying "You're doing so well."
- Tell the mourner what they "should" do.
- Say "Call me if you need anything."
- Delegate others to help.
- Say "I know how you feel."
- Use abrasive consolation, by saying "There are other fish in the sea," or "God works in mysterious ways."
- Try to hurry people through their grief by pressuring them to get busy or give away a loved one's possessions. Their grief must be done on their schedule, not yours.

## WHEN WILL THE GRIEF GET EASIER?

In the early days of the grief process, many griever's begin to think there will never be relief from the intense, unremitting symptoms of grief. Sleep may be disrupted, draining away your energy, motivation and desire. Concentrating on the simplest of tasks may sometimes seem beyond ability. Longing, loneliness and sadness feel like constant companions. As the days go by, other people in your life may express concern over the continued intensity of your grief and may gently suggest it is time to "move on." You may begin to wonder if your grief is normal.

It is important to recognize that what is "normal" varies widely among individuals. But generally, while intense emotional, physical and cognitive reactions are very normal in the early stages of grief, as time goes on, the griever usually finds such reactions decreasing in both intensity and frequency. Grief often intensifies two to three months after the loss and again

before the first anniversary. Special days and events can trigger grief for years to come. Also common are sudden, unexpected surges of grief around such things as hearing a special song or spotting a favorite restaurant. The griever gains experience in dealing with upsurges in acute grief in healthy ways that allow the activities of daily life to continue without too much disruption.

Looking for small signs of healing can be helpful. Perhaps you find yourself laughing more or you begin looking forward to future events and plans for the future. For most grieving people, healing occurs. Holding on to that hope and looking for small signs of healing can bring comfort during the heavy days of early grief.



*Ohio's Hospice's Guideposts Through Grief* is published quarterly for families, staff members and friends of Ohio's Hospice.

Kent Anderson, CEO  
Ohio's Hospice

The Pathways of Hope Grief Counseling Centers rely on the individual and community donors who so generously support the services we provide. Thanks to your generosity, all Pathways of Hope services are available without charge to serve the bereavement needs of anyone in the communities we serve. Donations to support our services are gratefully accepted at [OhiosHospice.org](http://OhiosHospice.org).

**"PATIENCE WILL SERVE YOU WELL  
AS YOU EXPERIENCE YOUR GRIEF  
AND MOURNING.... OUR SOCIETY IS  
CONSTANTLY TRYING TO SPEED UP  
OUR GRIEF."**

— Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.,  
*Healing Your Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas*

## ADDITIONAL BEREAVEMENT RESOURCES

Given the wide range and variable quality of books about grief and loss, choosing a book about grief can be a daunting task. The following is a list of books and internet resources that may provide a helpful starting place. Books may be found at your local library or can be purchased through local or on-line booksellers.

### BOOKS FOR ADULTS

**Ambiguous Loss: Learning To Live With Unresolved Grief.**

Pauline Boss. Harvard University Press.

**Bearing The Unbearable: Love, Loss, And The Heartbreaking Path Of Grief.**

Joanne Cacciatore, PhD.  
Simon & Schuster.

**I Wasn't Ready To Say Goodbye: Surviving, Coping, And Healing After The Sudden Death Of A Loved One.**

Brook Noel & Pamela D. Blair, PhD.  
Sourcebooks, Inc.

**Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, And Finding Joy.** Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant. Penguin Random House.

**Shattered: Surviving The Loss Of A Child.** Gary Roe. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

**The Hot Young Widows Club: Lessons On Surviving From The Front Lines Of Grief.** Simon & Schuster/TED.

**The Unspeakable Loss: How Do You Live After A Child Dies?**

DeCapo Lifelong Books.

**When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice For Difficult Times.**

Pema Chodron.  
Shambhala Publications.

### FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

**Cinnamon Roll Sunday: A Child's Story Of Anticipated Grief.**

Jennifer L. Allen, LMFT., ATR-BC. Creating Space Independent Publishing Platform.

**I Have A Question About Death: Clear Answers For All Kids Including Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder Or Other Special Needs.** Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

**Tear Soup: A Recipe For Healing After Loss.** Pat Schwiebert, Chuck Deklyn, et al. Grief Watch.

**The Elephant In The Room: A Child's Book For Grief And Loss.** Amanda Edwards, Leslie Ponciano, et al. Creating Space Independent Publishing Platform.

**The Good-Bye Book.** Todd Parr. Little Brown Books for Young Readers.

**Till We Meet Again.** Julie Muller. Illustrated by Camryn Cox. Julie Muller.

**What Does Dead Mean?** Caroline Jay and Jenni Thomas, OBE. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

**What Happens When A Loved One Dies? Our First Talk About Death.** Jillian Roberts and Cindy Revell. Orca Book Publishers.

### INTERNET RESOURCES

[www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org) (for children and teens)

[www.nationalallianceforgrievingchildren.org](http://www.nationalallianceforgrievingchildren.org)

[www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org) (for grieving parents/grandparents)

[www.dailystrength.org](http://www.dailystrength.org)

[www.opentohope.com](http://www.opentohope.com)

[www.whatsyourgrief.com](http://www.whatsyourgrief.com)

[www.centerforloss.com](http://www.centerforloss.com)

[www.griefshare.org](http://www.griefshare.org)

For more information, please call one of our Pathways of Hope contacts below.

## Pathways of Hope Grief Counseling Centers

### Community Care Hospice

1669 Rombach Ave., Wilmington, OH 45177

937.382.5400

[www.CommunityCareHospice.com](http://www.CommunityCareHospice.com)

### Ohio's Community Mercy Hospice

1830 N. Limestone St., Springfield, OH 45503

937.258.4991

[www.CommunityMercyHospice.org](http://www.CommunityMercyHospice.org)

### Ohio's Hospice at United Church Homes

7575 Paragon Rd. Dayton, OH 45459

937.256.4490

[www.OhiosHospice.org/UnitedChurchHomes](http://www.OhiosHospice.org/UnitedChurchHomes)

### Ohio's Hospice LifeCare

1900 Akron Rd. Wooster, OH 44691

330.264.4899

1109 Eastern Ave., Ashland, OH 44805

419.496.0057

1263 Glen Dr., Ste. B, Millersburg, OH 44654

330.674.8448

[www.OhiosHospiceLifeCare.org](http://www.OhiosHospiceLifeCare.org)

### Ohio's Hospice Loving Care

779 London Ave., Marysville, OH 43040

937.644.1928

[www.OhiosHospiceLovingCare.org](http://www.OhiosHospiceLovingCare.org)

### Ohio's Hospice of Butler & Warren Counties

5940 Long Meadow Dr., Franklin, OH 45005

513.422.0300

[www.HospiceofBWCo.org](http://www.HospiceofBWCo.org)

### Ohio's Hospice of Central Ohio

1565 Bethel Rd Columbus Oh 43220

740.788.1400

2269 Cherry Valley Rd., Newark, OH 43055

740.788.1400

1585 E. Main St., Lancaster, OH 43130

740.681.1000

1166 Military Rd., Zanesville, OH 43701

740.454.0000

[www.HospiceofCentralOhio.org](http://www.HospiceofCentralOhio.org)

### Ohio's Hospice of Dayton

324 Wilmington Ave., Dayton, OH 45420

937.258.4991

[www.HospiceofDayton.org](http://www.HospiceofDayton.org)

### Ohio's Hospice of Fayette County

222 N. Oakland Ave., Washington C.H., OH 43160

740.335.0149

[www.HospiceofFayetteCounty.org](http://www.HospiceofFayetteCounty.org)

### Ohio's Hospice of Miami County

3230 N. County Road 25A Troy, OH 45373

937.573.2114

[www.HospiceofMiamiCounty.org](http://www.HospiceofMiamiCounty.org)

### Ohio's Hospice of Morrow County

228 South St., Mount Gilead, OH 43338

419.946.9822

[www.HospiceMorrowCounty.org](http://www.HospiceMorrowCounty.org)