



Bereavement Bulletin

Grief has no boundaries:

An anonymous account of the lessons of grief after parent loss

As I approach a year since my Mother died, I believe grief has no boundaries. Fortunately, or unfortunately, my brother, sister and I experienced long goodbyes with our parents. We rode a roller coaster through traumatic and poignant times for about six years before my parents passed away within nearly a year of each other. I am fortunate they lived a long life. We had time to somewhat prepare, and our love was mutual and openly stated. Their legacy guides and lives with me daily.

Even so, I irrationally expected they would never die, since they lived against all odds, and doctors and hospice “predictions.” My parents’ deaths threw my life completely off balance. The center of my being ceased to exist. There are no predictions about how we will deal with the death of a loved one.

There are no predictions about how we will deal with grief either. I believe there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Forget what anyone tells you. Seek counseling, read books, do whatever you need to get through the tremendous pain and beauty of grieving. Forget comments such as “the milestones are painful”; “he or she is at peace,” and so forth. People mean well; they don’t know what to say or do unless they have lost a loved one within their immediate family. Trite but true.

It amazes me to see what grief does to people. It is unpredictable. My parents clearly instilled in their children to love and respect without judgment. They shared all they built for themselves and their children equally, and with charity. Sadly, an estate attorney shared with me that about 50% of families tear apart after a death. This would be impossible for me to believe if I did not see it myself, in others and in my family. Children not coping well during care-giving are the children you would expect to fall apart. With my family, we children who appeared to be strong and

in control of everything, are the ones who fell apart.

I do not know what will become of the children of my parents. Most of the time, we came together beautifully to care for my parents while they were alive. I suspect as we near the first anniversary of her death, and the legal closure hopefully approaches, we will take sabbaticals from this long process to allow the dust to settle in our rebuilt and reborn lives. Why else do we say “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust?” Perhaps, while the dead settle... so do the living.

There are no predictions about how we will deal with grief either. I believe there is no right or wrong way to grieve.

One last thought... I am not afraid of dying...I was before my parents died. Perhaps, it is the beauty of seeing life at full circle. Perhaps, it is knowing that the experts on dying – the most giving, genuine, good hearted souls on earth – the people of hospice... will be there if I need them. Hospice is not about dying. Hospice is about living.

Using hospice and palliative care is not about admitting your loved one is leaving. It is about seeking options and help to navigate the psychological, physical and spiritual aspects of one’s journey in sickness and life. If you, or a friend or a family member are struggling, please, please call hospice. Neither our family nor I would have survived without the guidance and care provided by hospice. I cannot imagine not calling hospice for support and learning about both the pain and beauty of grief.

I believe death is unpredictable. I believe grieving is unpredictable. Perhaps, it is time to truly accept that living is unpredictable. Live every day of life, and imagine and dream for the future. Believe life is for today; for this and the past is all we truly know.

Helping children grieve

By Shea Cranford Collins, M.Div.
Chaplain, Kid's Path®

One hundred years ago, death was much more a natural part of a child's experience. Grandparents often lived with families, so children witnessed them growing older and dying. Modern medicine has made strides in reducing infant and child mortality and has prolonged life expectancy for the elderly, so children witness fewer deaths. More and more elderly die in nursing homes and hospitals, outside the home environment. The exclusion of death from children's lives requires us to teach them explicitly about death and grief.

The grieving process is normal and helps people heal from their pain. Pain is a natural reaction when we lose someone close, and children are capable of accepting painful reality directly and openly. Often when adults try to protect children from the pain of loss, they actually are trying to protect themselves. The most important thing to remember in helping children cope with the death of a loved one is to allow them to express their grief in their own way and in their own time. It is important not to pressure children to resume their normal activities if they are not ready.

Children tend to have “grief bursts,” which then are followed by play and normal activities. Children may not be able to verbalize what they are feeling; instead they may demonstrate their feelings through their behavior and play. They may laugh or play at a time that appears inappropriate to an adult.

Children need to feel that it is all right to talk about death and to grieve. If a child does not want to talk about his or her grief, adults need to respect that desire. Adults should let the grieving child know that they are available to listen and help, and that any feelings the child has—anger, sadness, fear or regret—are normal. Hugging and touching help the grieving

child feel secure in expressing emotions and also reassures the child that he or she is loved and will be cared for.

Messages relayed to a grieving child such as “Don't cry,” “You need to be strong,” “You're the man in the family now,” or “Be a good girl, your mommy needs your help now more than ever,” suppress grief expression in the child and set up unfair expectations. Adults should intervene gently if they observe a child taking on adult roles and tasks. Grieving children should not be allowed to take on the role of the “confidante” or partner of one parent if the other parent has died.

It is also important that adults not hide their own feelings of grief from a bereaved child. If they do, they teach the child that feelings are not all right – that they are something to be ashamed of and to be kept to oneself. It also is true that grieving adults should not grieve profusely and at length in front of a child since it might frighten and worry the child.

Religion is an important source of strength for many adults and children during the grief process. Children take things literally, so explanations such as “It is God's will,” or “Johnnie is happy in heaven,” could be frightening or confusing, rather than comforting; particularly if religion has not played an important role in the child's life. It's important to inquire how the child perceives what is explained about the death. It also is important that children be allowed to express their religious and spiritual concerns.

Parents may be tempted to “send children away” when there is a loss – either to protect them from painful feelings or because it is difficult to care for the children while grieving themselves. During the grieving period, children often are most comforted by familiar surroundings and routines; separation may increase their fears about abandonment and change.

Helping a child grieve means offering them compassion and comfort. It means being consistent and understanding, and finally it means reaching out to them with heartfelt love.



Kids Path® presents the 9th annual CHAMELEON'S JOURNEY™ - October 18-19, 2008

Now is the time to apply for the 9th annual Chameleon's Journey weekend October 18-19, 2008, presented by Kids Path. Since its inception in 2000, the response to the children's grief camp has been spectacular, with over 500 campers participating in this unique overnight camp experience. As these campers spread the word to others, the camp continues to grow in popularity. Chameleon's Journey is held at Camp Thunderbird, in Lake Wylie, SC, a YMCA affiliated camp located approximately 20 miles from downtown Charlotte.



Grieving children need a supportive environment in which they can share their feelings of sadness, anger, an inability to sleep and other emotional and physical reactions to losing a loved one. Campers, under the guidance of a well-trained staff, learn healthy coping skills, gain confidence and meet new friends as they walk the grief journey. If you are interested in obtaining a camp application packet for your child(ren), ages 7-16, please contact Katie Allen at 704.335.3529, allenk@hpccr.org, or download an application by visiting www.hpccr.org. The deadline for applications is September 26, 2008.

Continuing Connections Workshop

Relationships are not necessarily broken or abandoned when our loved ones pass away. In fact, current research shows that grievers can experience on-going healing and benefits from continuing connections to their loved one. To explore the many ways in which healthy connections are part of our everyday lives, you are invited to attend this important new workshop and to hear first hand from individuals who have experienced the loss of their loved ones and how they continue to honor and keep alive the memories of deceased loved ones. Several evenings and locations are offered for your participation and convenience. Light refreshments will be served. To help with our planning reservations are requested. Please call Gerri for reservations and directions at 704.335.4334 or visit www.hpccr.org.

Monday, July 21, 2008
6:30-8pm
HPCCR – Uptown
1420 East Seventh Street
Charlotte

Thursday, July 24, 2008
6:30-8pm
HPCCR – South Charlotte
7845 Little Avenue
Charlotte

Tuesday, July 22, 2008
6:30-8pm
Levine & Dickson Hospice House
11900 Vanstory Drive
Huntersville

McCrorey YMCA
3801 Beatties Ford Road
Charlotte
Call 704.335.4334 for details
on date and time.

Forgiveness: The Art of Healing Grief

Hospice and Palliative Care, Lincoln County will host an evening workshop on ***Forgiveness: The Art of Healing Grief*** on Monday, July 14 from 6:30-8pm at the office on 107 Cedar Street, Lincolnton. We will present a PowerPoint presentation on the benefits of forgiveness, what forgiveness is and what it is not. We will also include the challenges of not being able to forgive, whether it is God, your loved one or yourself. We will invite discussion on understanding forgiveness as a process and as a healing tool. All who believe they may benefit from this presentation are invited to attend. There is no charge for this event, but please call our office to register at 704.732.6146.

GRIEF EDUCATION

Our nine-county service area: Cabarrus, Catawba, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Union and York

Fall Grief Support Groups

We invite you to join one of our upcoming eight-week support groups.

“Grief: The Reluctant Journey”

Please call 704.335.4334 for registration, or visit us at www.hpccr.org.

Tuesday, September 9 – October 28, 2008
 2-3:30pm
 HPCCR – South Charlotte
 8745 Little Avenue

Thursday, September 11 – October 30, 2008
 6-7:30pm
 HPCCR – South Charlotte
 8745 Little Avenue

Monday, September 8 – October 27, 2008
 6:30-8pm
 Levine & Dickson Hospice House
 11900 Vanstory Drive
 Huntersville

Tuesday, September 9 – October 28, 2008
 Noon-1:30pm
 HPCCR – Lincoln County
 107 North Cedar Street
 Lincolnton

“Let’s Do Lunch” Grief Support Group

4th Wednesday of each month at 11:30am

Location: The Olive Garden, 9421 Pineville – Matthews Road, Pineville, NC

Individual grief counseling sessions are available upon request at all offices.

For more information on grief groups, grief education or to discuss your feelings and experiences with loss, call 704.335.4300. Office hours are Monday – Friday, 8:30 am - 5pm

The mission of Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region is to relieve suffering and improve the quality and dignity of life through compassionate hospice care for those at the end of life, palliative care for those with advanced illness, and through community education.
How we care for you: Hospice Care, Palliative Medicine Consultants, Kids Path[®] Pediatric Care, Grief Care, Inpatient & Residential Hospice Care and Professional & Community Education.

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