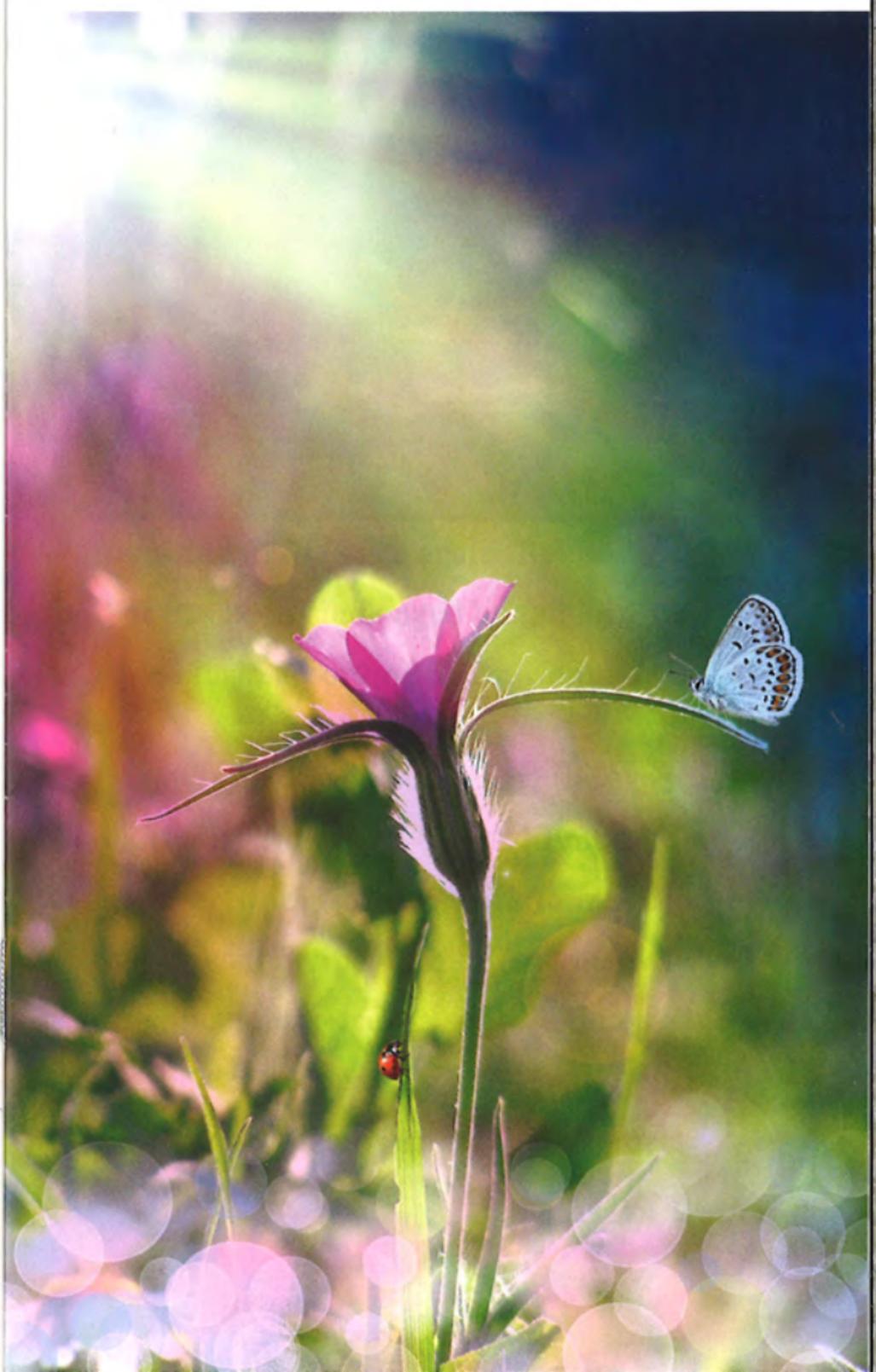
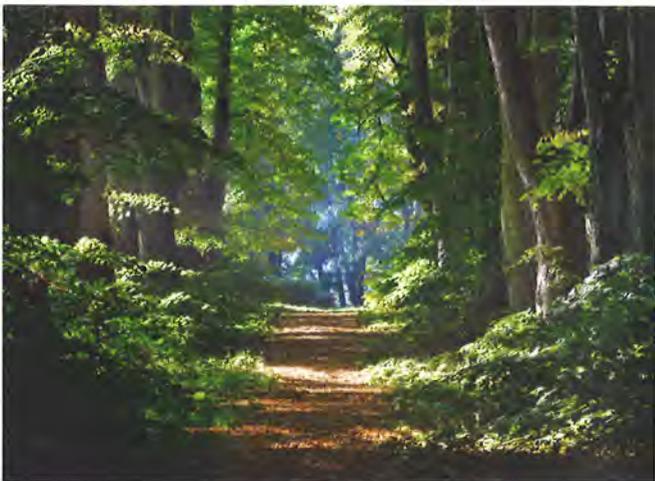


Living with Grief





Grief is a normal and natural response to any loss or change. It is a uniquely individual process that can be affected by variables such as the cause of death, one's relationship with the deceased, and the age of the survivor. These may impact the ability of the mourner to cope with a loss. In his book, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, Dr. William Worden explains the grief process by identifying tasks the mourner must complete in order to integrate the loss into life. These include acknowledging the loss has occurred, embracing the pain of grief, adjusting to an environment without the deceased and investing in life once again. Rebuilding faith that has been challenged by the loss is an added task, according to Dr. Kenneth Doka.

“People are forever changed by the experience of grief in their lives. We, as humans, do not ‘get over’ our grief, but work to reconcile ourselves to living with it. Anyone who attempts to prescribe a specific time frame for the experience only creates another obstacle for the mourner to overcome.”

Dr. Alan Wolfelt

WHAT MIGHT I EXPERIENCE?

Shock and Denial

“I Just Don’t Believe It!”

The first announcement that a death has occurred is often shocking. The impact of the tragedy may take a few minutes, days or weeks to be realized. Realization, for some, is an ongoing struggle months after the death.

Emotional Release

“I Can’t Stop Crying.”

Crying is only one of the normal reactions to a death. It is often said tears are the safety valve of the heart. Mental health professionals emphasize the importance of embracing and expressing emotions, with the funeral being a safe place to begin this process.

Loneliness

“Without Him I Might As Well Be Dead!”

A feeling of emptiness may occur after the funeral as friends return to their own activities. Therefore, the feelings of loneliness, isolation and depression often become more intense. The thought that no one has ever suffered as much may exist. Support groups can help ease the sense of isolation by providing a place to give and receive support.

Physical Symptoms

“I Just Can’t Bear It!”

Anxiety and loneliness can create emotional pain. This strain of grief can also cause physical distress. If the physical signs continue for a prolonged period of time, it is important to have a complete physical examination and seek the help of a counselor.

Disorientation

“What Am I Going To Do?”

It may become difficult to concentrate on anything. Simple decisions can be overwhelming. This is the time to ask others to help. Making lists and/or writing your thoughts down may keep you focused.



Guilt

“I Should Have Done More For Her.”

Frequently, survivors lament about what could have been done for the person who died. Feelings of guilt are realistic and common. But sometimes, a person will experience unrealistic guilt stemming from a situation which was uncontrollable. This type of guilt is irrational and should be discussed. Seek the help of a trusted friend or counselor because unresolved guilt can prolong the grief process.

Anger

“Why Me?”

After dealing with personal guilt, it becomes natural to look for someone else to blame. There may be hostility toward the physician, God, nurses, the deceased, or anyone who seemingly could have prevented the death. These feelings of anger should be expressed appropriately. It is best to disclose them to an empathetic listener.

Depression

“Will Life Ever Be Worth Living Again?”

Feelings of depression are normal and may lead to a sense of weariness and isolation. Sometimes, suffering in silence seems easier than socializing. Exercising, drinking plenty of water and forcing yourself to get involved in activities will help ease the depression. When the despair mounts, talk with someone who is supportive.

Hope

“I Now Realize The Meaning Of Friends.”

Through the affection and encouragement of friends and family, gradually a new meaning for life unfolds. As you begin to enter into activities, your mood will brighten, and life will begin to take on a new perspective.

Readjustment

“Knowing I’m Adjusting to Life Again is Reassuring.”

The acuteness of the death will diminish as readjustment begins. This is a lifelong process. You are well on your way when recalling the deceased becomes a pleasant experience and planning for the future becomes realistic and hopeful.

HOW CAN I LEARN TO MANAGE THE LOSS?

Acknowledge that Grief is “Work”

Face the crisis actively so as to realize the full reality of what has happened. By viewing the body of the deceased, discussing the death with friends at the visitation, and personalizing the funeral ceremony you can begin to accept the permanence of the loss. Although it is painful, you begin to realize you don’t get over grief, you learn to live with it.



Surround Yourself With Friends And Family

Receiving friends at the funeral home is one way to allow others to show they care. Their warmth, support and empathy will be helpful at critical moments throughout the grief process. Do not be afraid to cry with them and let them know you appreciate their concern.

Avoid Using Alcohol and Drugs to Cope

The use of alcohol and other drugs tends to mask or prolong the grieving process. Consult your physician if you have any questions regarding your currently prescribed medications.

Refrain From Making Hasty Decisions

Immediately taking an unplanned trip or changing your residence is not the answer. Making major decisions should be delayed, if possible. Talking is the key to sorting out what you need to do. Conversations with friends and family may help you gain new perspectives on your situation.



Recall The Memories

Sometimes bereaved individuals feel the solution to grief is to “forget.” However, it is good to talk about the life of the deceased. Reminiscing helps to establish the significance of his or her life, enabling you to grieve more fully.

Consult With Professionals If Grief Becomes Unbearable

Funeral directors, local hospices, faith leaders and counselors are excellent resources for grief support.

Avoid Relying Completely On the Advice Of Friends

Often, well-meaning friends may be unfamiliar with the grief process or unaware of your true needs. Realize their intentions are certainly in your interest, but sometimes their advice may be misdirected.

Communicate Your Feelings to Others

Sharing your problems and memories with those who care can help to ease the emotional pain. It is all right to repeat these stories again and again. Writing in a journal is another helpful practice for expressing your feelings.

Establish Goals For Yourself

Concentrating on serving others and developing new interests can relieve your loneliness and give new purpose to your life. You may volunteer to serve charitable organizations or support groups. Consider seeking further education, increasing your involvement in work, and joining service or travel clubs as ways of adding new meaning to your life.

Maintain Hope

Eventually you will remember the good times, and the bad ones will fade. Remember, when death comes...part of the deceased lives on with the survivor.

“A shared pain is no longer paralyzing but mobilizing...When we become aware that we do not have to escape our pains, but that we can mobilize them into a common search... those very pains are transformed from expressions of despair into signs of hope.” – *Henri Nouwen*

HELPFUL BOOKS...

Don't Take My Grief Away From Me, Doug Manning
Grief—What It Is and What You Can Do, Joy and Dr. Marvin Johnson

In My Mother's Kitchen—An Introduction to the Healing Power of Reminiscence, Robin A. Edgar

One You Love Has Died—Ideas for How Your Grief Can Help You Heal, James E. Miller

Tear Soup, Pat Schwiebert and Chuck DeKlyen, Illustrated by Taylor Bills

The Grief Recovery Handbook—The Action Program for Moving Beyond Death, Divorce, and Other Losses, John W. James and Russell Friedman

Understanding Your Grief—Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart, Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Bereaved Parents/Grandparents

Dear Parents—Letters to Bereaved Parents, Centering Corporation

For Bereaved Grandparents, Margaret Gerner

Children/Adult Children

Children Grieve, Too—Helping Children Cope With Grief, Joy and Dr. Marvin Johnson

Grief Comes to Class—An Educator's Guide, Majel Gliko-Braden

Healing the Adult Child's Grieving Heart—100 Practical Ideas After Your Parent Dies, Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Holidays/Special Days

Not Just Another Day—Families, Grief, and Special Days, Missy Lowery Throckmorton

How to Help

Healing a Friend's Grieving Heart—100 Practical Ideas for Helping Someone You Love Through Loss, Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Stepping Through the Awkwardness—How to Help Someone Who is Grieving the Death of a Loved One, Marilyn Gryte

The Power of Presence—Helping People Help People, Doug Manning

What Can I Say and Do?—How to Support Someone Who is Grieving a Loss, Kelly Osmont, MSW, LCSW, CGP

Miscarriage/Infant Loss

Miscarriage—A Book for Parents, Centering Corporation

This Little While—For Parents Experiencing the Death of a Very Small Infant, Joy and Dr. Marvin Johnson

When Hello Means Goodbye—A Guide for Parents Whose Child Dies Before Birth, At Birth or Shortly After Birth, Pat Schwiebert, RN and Paul Kirk, MD

Pet Loss

Good-bye My Friend—Grieving the Loss of a Pet, Mary and Herb Montgomery

Suicide

When Someone You Love Completes Suicide—This is Survivable!, Sondra Sexton-Jones, M.S., L.P.C., L.M.F.T.

Teen

When Death Walks In—For Teenagers Facing Grief, Mark Scrivani

Trauma/Tragedy

Healing Your Traumatized Heart—100 Practical Ideas After Someone You Love Dies a Sudden, Violent Death, Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

No One Should See What I Have Seen—A Book for Those Who Have Experienced Terrifying and Horrific Tragedy, Centering Corporation

Widow/Widowers

A Handbook for Widowers, Ed Ames

A Journey Through Widowhood, Romaine Presnell

Finding Your Way After Your Spouse Dies, Marta Felber

Healing Moments—A Collection of Inspiring Reflections After the Death of a Spouse, Mary J. Nowyj

Workplace

Healing Grief at Work—100 Practical Ideas After Your Workplace is Touched by Loss, Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

The Ohio Funeral Directors Association publishes seven brochures and four leaflets. For a complete list of titles, consult your local funeral director.

For a listing of resources for children and teens refer to the OFDA brochure, *Should Children Know About Death*.