Supporting Others Through

Difficult Times

Presented by:
Linda Tebelman,
Director of Bereavement Care, ret.
Montgomery Hospice
1355 Piccard Drive, Suite 100
Rockville, Maryland 20850
www.montgomeryhospice.org
301-921-4400

Montgomery Hospice
What Can We Give a Friend Who is Struggling?

1. We can give our time and presence.

2. We can give our talents and skills.

3. We can give good listening.

4. We can give our understanding of the nature of grief.

5. We can give our patience.

6. We can give our hospitality.

7. We can give our memories of the loved one.
**GRIEF CYCLE**

**Life Journey**
- Reinvesting in relationships
- Identifying new life purposes
- Feeling pleasure in remembering
- Expanding social networks
- Expanding roles and skills

**Renewed Life**
- Ebb and flow of feeling
- Occasionally peaceful
- Regained confidence
- Independence
- Beginning to feel like yourself

**Losing Heart**
- Not caring
- Lack of focus
- Preoccupied with illness or death
- Worthlessness
- Suicidal feelings
- Depression
- Restlessness

**Longing**
- Haunting images
- Vivid dreams
- Guilt
- Agony
- Anger
- Loneliness
- Missing them
- Heartache

**Stunned**
- Shock
- Confusion
- Denial
- Panic
- On edge
- Stressed out
- Numb
- Lowered self-esteem
- Sense of presence
- Mixed feelings

- Intense crying
- Physical symptoms
- Passive
- Zombie-like
- Going through the motions
- Zoned out
- Outbursts

Adapted from M.A.P.D.
PLEASE
don’t ask me if I’m over it yet. I’ll never be “over it.”
PLEASE
don’t tell me s/he’s in a better place. He isn’t here.
PLEASE
don’t say, “At least s/he isn’t suffering.” I haven’t come to terms with why s/he had to suffer at all.
PLEASE
don’t tell me you know how I feel. I often don’t know myself.
PLEASE
don’t ask me if I feel better. Bereavement/grief isn’t a condition that “clears up.”
PLEASE
don’t tell me, “God never makes a mistake.” You mean He did this on purpose?
PLEASE
don’t tell me “at least you had him/her for ____ years.” What year would you choose for your loved one to die?
PLEASE
don’t tell me God never gives you more than you can bear. Who decides how much another person can bear?
PLEASE
don’t ask me if I’m going to remove my wedding rings. They hold comforting memories for me.
PLEASE
just say you’re sorry for my loss.
PLEASE
just say you remember him/her, if you do. I need to talk about him/her.
PLEASE
just let me talk if I want to.
PLEASE
just let me cry when I can, or when I must.
PLEASE
help me remember all the many things I am feeling are normal (it’s called grief!).
PLEASE
just give me a hug; it’s often better than words!
LISTEN

When I ask you to listen to me and you start giving advice, you have not done what I asked. When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell my why I shouldn't feel that way, you are trampling on my feelings. When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to do something to solve my problem, you have failed me, strange as that may seem.

Listen!
All I asked was that you listen, not talk or do - Just hear me.

Perhaps that's why prayer works, sometimes, for some people—because God is mute, and He doesn't give advice or try to fix things.

So please listen and hear me.

And if you want to talk, wait a minute for your turn—and I'll listen to you.

(Excerpted from a talk by Rosemary Matson who was a guest speaker at the Unitarian Fellowship of San Mateo, California on March 2, 1975. The primary author is not known at this time—but each of us could be!)

The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn’t being said.

Peter Drucker
Ways to Help a Grieving Friend

Grief can be a difficult and stressful experience and supporting a grieving friend can be challenging. Feeling awkward and unsure are normal when faced with such difficult losses. What is most important is that we reach past our own discomfort because our support is vital and important to our friends and family as they learn to live with loss and find their way towards the future. Here are some ideas that will help you as you help others.

Understanding the Experience of Grief: Grief is as individual as we are, but there are common elements that are helpful to remember. In the beginning shock, numbness and disbelief are to be expected. Periods of depression and longing to be with the deceased are part of the grieving process. Intense feelings such as sadness, anger, guilt, regret and loneliness can be difficult to witness and overwhelming to experience. Usually the intensity of these feelings and experiences will change over time with the love and support of others as we learn to live with loss.

Some Things to Remember:

- There is more than one way to journey through grief. There is not one right way, but many paths each person will find their own. Some people need to talk, others need to be silent. Some people need to do things, others need to be still. Let the griever lead you.
- Be patient. Grief takes time. How much time depends on many things, but it is usually more time than most people expect. The bereaved often get messages that “they should be over it by now” and should be “moving on.” They may even hear this just a couple of weeks after the death. Let them know that the first year can be very challenging as there are many firsts to be experienced. The first birthdays, anniversaries and holidays without a loved one can be very difficult. Your presence and support will be especially appreciated during these times.
- Avoid platitudes, such as “This is part of God’s plan.” or “He/she is in a better place.” These can be very hard words to hear and can cause pain and anger. Let the griever tell you about their beliefs regarding the death. Struggling with doubts and faith are a normal experience for many. Anger needs to be expressed and worked through.
- Listen. Your experiences maybe similar, but no two journeys of grief are exactly the same because our relationships are unique and special. If asked, be willing to share your own experience with grief, but remember that what grievers need most of all is to be heard. Let them tell their story and listen, really listen to what they need to say. Be willing to sit in silence. Sometimes your quiet presence and reassuring hug maybe all that is needed.
- Share stories and memories of the deceased. Be willing to say their name, talk about what you will always remember and hold in your heart. The bereaved need to know that their loved one’s life had meaning and that their presence in your life will not be forgotten.
- Pay special attention to the children and teens. They are deeply affected by loss and may not know how to express their feelings. Younger children do not have a clear understanding about the permanence of death. Often children show their grief through their behaviors, not through talking. They do not grieve in the same manner as adults. Children will re-experience the loss at later developmental
stages as their understanding of death deepens and milestones are reached. Teens need the support of peers as they struggle with complicated feelings. All children need to know that they have the support of caring adults as they learn to live with loss.

- Call and offer concrete support. Expecting the grieving person to reach out to you is generally unrealistic. They maybe too confused and preoccupied to ask for help. Calling and offering specific ideas can be a great gift. You can do the grocery shopping, make meals, drive the kids to sports or play practice, offer to babysit, etc. Take the initiative, but let the bereaved tell you what will be most helpful. They may already have more lasagna in the freezer than they can possible eat, but help with the lawn or with laundry might be most appreciated. Show up and ask “How can I help today?”

- Be there for the long haul. Know that your love and support are needed at the time of death, but also in six months, two years and beyond. We do not “get over” the death of loved ones, but we can and do learn to live with loss and to carry our grief more easily. Your love and caring will be needed all along the way.

- Take care of yourself. You may also be grieving. Know your limits and enlist the support of others.

Sometimes grief can become complicated. Ups and downs are to be expected but generally, powerful feelings and emotions tend to lessen over the first year. Special days and the anniversary of the death may bring a resurgence of these feelings, but overall the bereaved may experiencing some lifting of the heavy burden of grief. If you are concerned that the griever’s experiences are intensifying talking with a Bereavement Counselor can be helpful. We can offer suggestions for other supports such as reading materials, counseling resources, groups and workshops. Montgomery Hospice Bereavement Counselors are available to help you support loved ones on the path of grief.
Supporting Friends or Family Who Are Grieving

Death and grief spare no one and are normal life events. All cultures have developed expectations and norms about coping with death. It is important to understand someone else’s loss from the perspective of the cultural and family traditions unique to that individual.

When people are grieving, thoughts and emotions are often heightened. People who care about the bereaved are often unsure how to be helpful; they do not know what to say or do. The primary and most important thing to do is to show that you care by being present and by listening and supporting family and friends who are grieving. Offering advice or suggestions is not needed; try to become comfortable with quietly supporting a person with your presence.

There is no right way to grieve and mourn. Be very careful not to impose your ideas, beliefs and expectations on someone else, no matter how much you think it might help. The following are some suggestions of ways you can support a grieving friend or family member.

- **Acknowledge all feelings.** Their grief reactions are natural and necessary. Do not pass judgment on how well they are or are not coping.
- **Understand and accept cultural and religious perspectives about illness and death that may be different from your own.** For example, if a family has decided to not allow their children to attend the funeral because of their beliefs that children should not be exposed to death, support their decision even if this may not be what you would do.
- **Acknowledge that life won’t “feel the same” and the person may not be able to “get back to normal.”** Help the person to renew interest in past activities and hobbies, when they are ready, or to discover new areas of interest. Offer suggestions such as, “Let’s go to the museum on Saturday to see the new exhibit,” but be accepting if your offer is declined.
- **Be willing to stay engaged for a long time.** Your friend or family member will need your support and presence in the weeks and months to come after most others will have withdrawn.
- **Be specific in your willingness to help.** Offer assistance with chores such as childcare or meals. For example, suggest, “I’ll bring dinner on Thursday; how many people will be there?”
• Check on your friend or relative as time passes and months go by. Periodic check-ins can be helpful throughout the first two years after the death. Stay in touch by writing a note, calling, stopping by to visit, or perhaps bringing flowers.

• Be sensitive to holidays and special days. For someone grieving a death, certain days may be more difficult and can magnify the sense of loss. Anniversaries and birthdays can be especially hard. Some people find it helpful to be with family and friends, others may wish to avoid traditions and try something different. Extend an invitation to someone who might otherwise spend time alone during a holiday or special day, and recognize they may or may not accept your offer.

• Identify friends who might be willing to help with specific tasks on a regular basis. Performing tasks such as picking up the kids from school or refilling prescriptions can be a big help.

NATIONAL HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE CARE ORGANIZATION
Bibliography on Grief and Loss

General loss

Books for Grieving Parents

Adult Children Loss of a Parent

Loss of a Spouse or Partner


**Books for Grieving Parents to help Grieving Kids**


**Books for Grieving Teens**


**Books for Grieving Children**


The Doug Center. *After a Suicide: A Workbook for Grieving Kids.* (help@doug.org), 2001.


(Montgomery Hospice Bereavement Care Program, 3/18/15)
Montgomery Hospice
1355 Picard Drive, Suite 100
Rockville, Maryland 20850
301-921-4400
www.montgomeryhospice.org

BEREAVEMENT REFERRAL RESOURCES

Organizations that offer Grief support Groups and other Grief Support:

1. Haven of Northern Virginia ................................................................. 703-941-7000
2. Holy Cross Hospice ............................................................................... 301-754-7742
3. Capital Caring (was Capital Hospice in DC) .......................................... 202-244-8300
4. Capital Caring (was Capital Hospice in Northern Virginia) in Alexandria, VA ...................................................... 703-333-6960
5. Capital Caring (was Capital Hospice in Northern Virginia) in Arlington ................................................................. 703-351-2800
6. Capital Caring (was Capital Hospice in Prince George’s County) ........ 301-883-0866
7. Community Hospices of Washington .................................................. 202-895-2600
8. Hospice Caring, Inc. .............................................................................. 301-990-0854
9. Hospice of the Chesapeake in Prince George’s County ......................... 301-499-4500
10. Hospice of Frederick County ................................................................ 240-566-3030
11. Gilchrist Hospice of Howard County ................................................... 410-730-5072
12. Hospice of the Jewish Social Service Agency (also has suicide support group) ............................................................... 301-816-2676
13. Interfaith Chapel at Leisure World (priority for space given to Leisure World residents) .................................................. 301-598-5312
14. Shady Grove Adventist Hospital ........................................................... 240-826-6000
15. Washington Adventist Hospital ............................................................. 301-891-7600
17. Washington Regional Transplant Community Young Widowhood Group .......................................................... 703-641-0100
18. Wendt Center for Loss and Healing ....................................................... 202-624-0010
19. Whitman Walker Clinic (for AIDS related bereavement & LGBT bereavement) .............................................................. 202-745-7000
20. Homicide Survivor Support in Montgomery County (predominantly individual support) ................................................. 240-777-1348
21. Homicide Survivor Support Group in Pr. George’s County, Stephanie Roper Foundation .................................................. 301-952-0063
22. Suicide Survivors Group at North Bethesda United Methodist Church .............................................................. 301-530-4342
23. Crisis Link (suicide prevention and help for survivors, 24 hour helpline) ................................................................. 703-527-4077
24. National Students of AMF for grieving College Students http://www.studentsofamf.org/about/

There are other local congregations and organizations that offer grief groups—ask around your neighborhood

Resources for Bereaved Children:

1. Montgomery Hospice (301-921-4400), Hospice Caring (301-990-8904), Wendt Center for Loss and Healing (202-624-0010) all have groups for bereaved children

   Hospice of Chesapeake, P.G.County, Camp Phoenix and Nabe... 301-499-4500
   Frederick Hospice, Camp Jamie ........................................................... 240-566-3030
   Capital Caring, Point of Hope Camp .................................................... 703-538-2044
   Hospice Caring, Camp Caring ............................................................. 301-990-8904
   Comfort Zone ..................................................................................... 1-866-488-5679

3. Expressive Therapy: Grief Groups for Children/ Adolescents ................. 301-869-1017
4. Center for Adoption Support and Ed., C.A.S.E, in Burtonsville, MD .......... 301-476-8525
Resources for Parents that lost a Child through Miscarriage, SIDS/Infant Death:

1. SIDS/Miscarriage/Infant Death Volunteer Group (Diana Delgrossop) ............................ 301-530-1094
2. Washington Adventist Hospital Empty Arms, Aching Heart group .......... 301-891-7600 or 301-891-5265

Self-Help Organizations:
1. Compassionate Friends in Maryland, Barbara Beall ...................................................... 301-253-8740
3. Compassionate Friends for D.C., Olivia Gunther ......................................................... 301-552-2798
4. National Headquarters for Compassionate Friends .................................................. 877-969-0010
5. CandleLighters for D.C (for parents whose child died from cancer) ...................... 302-747-7191
6. Yellow Ribbon Suicide Support Group (at Mill Creek United Methodist Church, Rev. Deb Scott) ........... 301-641-4601
7. Sudden Infant Death (SIDS) Univ. Of Maryland ......................................................... 1-800-808-7437 or 410-328-4474
8. Widowed Persons Service of Silver Spring, AARP ...................................................... 301-949-7398

Internet Resources on Death and Grief:

General Loss
1. Resources for bereavement ........................................... www.hospicenet.org
2. General grief support in Spanish ........................................... www.vivirlaperdida.com
3. Genesis, New Beginnings for Bereaved ........................................... www.genesis-resources.com
4. General resources for bereavement ........................................... www.grievingcenter.org
5. Resources for LGBT bereavement ........................................... www.whitman-walker/mautnerproject
6. Online memorials ........................................... www.inlovingmemoryonline.com

Young Widows and Widowers
8. Resources for single fathers who have lost spouse to cancer ......................... www.singlefathersduetocancer.org

Family and Child Grief
10. Bereavement resources for families ........................................... www.bereavedfamilies.net
11. The Dougy Center for Grieving Children and Families ..................................... www.dougy.org
14. Rainbows (grieving children) ........................................... www.rainbows.org

Child Loss
16. Resources for parents who lost a child ........................................... www.compassionatefriends.org
17. Resources for miscarriage, infant death, & stillborn ........................................... www.nationalshare.org
18. Resources for parents who have lost their only child ........................................... www.alivealone.org
19. Resources for parents of children who were murdered ........................................... www.POMC.com
20. Bereaved Parents of the USA ........................................... www.bereavedparentsusa.org

Crisis Center (24 Hotline), Montgomery County ........................................... 240-777--4000
Call this hotline number when someone is having serious difficulty and needs immediate help.

If you want information on a hospice bereavement care program in another part of the country for yourself or someone else, please call: National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization at 703-837-1500. They can provide an address and phone number for a hospice anywhere in the country.

Revised 5/15