

Journey

Spring 2017

A grief community publication
from Northern Illinois Hospice



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Insert

Grief Can Be Complicated

Learning to Create Rituals

We, as humans, like things to remain the same. Change is scary and often difficult. After the death of a loved one we may find ourselves struggling to make things “normal.” Spring is a good time to look at ideas to assist us in transitioning. Rituals, as they are called, can aid us in opening a new chapter of our grief-journey.

So what is a ritual. It’s a ceremony or action performed in a customary way with activities involving gestures, words, and objects that are performed according to sequence. A church service incorporates ritual. A family dinner can be a ritual, or a morning routine.

Rituals can be done spontaneously or they can be scripted, done alone, or acted out with others. When creating your own ritual, think of structure and creativity. All rituals have a beginning, a middle, and an end. You may consider including the elements of air, fire, water, and earth into



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Bill of Rights

This "Bill of Rights" was created by a group of teenagers who brainstormed things they would like others to know regarding grieving teens. Below is a small sample of what they would like us to know. With that in mind, these also are very applicable to anyone's grief journey...

- Don't let anyone tell you how to grieve.
- If I'm angry, depressed, _____, let me be that way.
- Don't put a time limit on grief.
- Allow me time to remember.
- I have the right to re-grieve.
- Never be afraid to talk about them [the person who died].
- YOU ARE NOT ALONE.
- Grief bursts happen. It's okay.
- I'm not breakable.
- We can share our pain.
- I don't have to explain to you.
- Don't laugh at my pain. Grief is real.
- My pain is not funny, but I can have fun in my pain.
- You have the right to get help.
- There are many different kinds of grief.
- Friends and family mend broken hearts.
- We have the right not to be treated or looked at differently for the way we grieve.
- Never underestimate a person who might be grieving.
- We have the right to have our own space.
- We have the right to be heard.

What other things would you add to this list? I'd love to hear from you. Drop me a note at avitale@niha.org or call me at 815.398.0500.

Referenced from C. Fox, Ted E. Bear Hollow, Omaha, NE.

From the Bereavement Coordinator

Happy Spring!

Spring has finally sprung and we visually move from the coldness of the winter tomb into the joy and vibrancy of life. Yes, even the seasons live out their lives within ours. It

is very easy to say "death sucks" in the dead of winter or anytime, but death has been with us since the beginning of time. It can continue to be a negative thing in our lives, or we, like the season of Winter, can allow ourselves to be overcome by joy and new life.

As I write this, I am aware that I, too, am celebrating a death anniversary – that of my dad, who died March 31, 2012. Five years already. It is hard for me to believe and, occasionally, even I get "stuck" in my grief and have "trigger events" which pull me back to a moment of illness or death. These happen when we least expect them and although they seem to set us back, they really aren't – rather, time begins to heal open wounds and we begin to heal into wholeness.

In this newsletter's insert, I have laid out a "game plan" for all who grieve, that is, "Four Tasks of Mourning" which are necessary to go through for anyone who is grieving the loss of a loved one. They were created by J. William Worden, Ph.D. I also tried to simplify them by borrowing from two other colleagues of mine in the field of grief, Sandi Caplan and Gordon Lang. The insert will further explain these and it is my hope and prayer that they will offer help and insights into your own grief journey.

Remember, I am always open to hearing your story of what has worked for you. I'd love to meet over a cup o' Joe and share your grief-journey! Call or email me, I'd love to hear from you. Peace.



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AARGH! Grief Can Be Complicated...

By Andrew J. Vitale, CT
Bereavement Coordinator/
Spiritual Counselor

Death sucks.

Our vision of death can be very similar to that statement above, or we can begin to accept the truth that death has always been around since the beginning of time and it really isn't that horrible thing we've been taught. I guess it means we may have to un-learn ourselves into a more accepting position of death and its reality within our lives.

J. William Worden, Ph.D., has laid out "Four Tasks of Mourning" that are necessary to go through for anyone who is grieving the loss of a loved one. They are:

1) Accept the reality of the loss, 2) Experience the pain of grief, 3) Adjust to an environment with the deceased missing, and 4) Withdraw emotional energy and reinvest it in other relationships. Taking from two other colleagues of mine in the grief field, Sandi Caplan and Gordon Lang, these four tasks can look like this: 1) Talk, 2) Feel, 3) Think, and 4) Change and Grow.

Allow me to break this down a bit. Grief is a highly personal response to life losses. Our responses are feelings, reactions, and behaviors. When we grieve we almost always have some core feelings which are present: powerlessness, fear, anger and guilt. There are others, but



these are main ones we each feel.

This is the part of grief that usually is an "ah-ha" moment for most people; on the INSIDE we may feel like we are going crazy. This is one of the most common expressions I hear from bereaved people: "I thought I was going crazy."

However, at the same time, on the OUTSIDE, there are many definite but unwritten rules that are taking effect. These rules come from family, friends, the workplace, culture, and religion.

According to Caplan and Lang, some of these unwritten,

dangerous rules are:

- 1) Don't talk about it.
- 2) Don't feel. That is, don't cry, don't show emotions.
- 3) Don't trust. This one originates inside the bereaved person when he or she accepts the first two rules. If I cannot feel or talk about it, whom can I trust with my feelings, my story, my urge to talk about my loss without fear of rejection or judgment?
- 4) Don't think for yourself. They know best. Who am I to question them? When we are grieving we can

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AARGH! Grief Can Be...

Continued from front

feel helpless about the loss. This feeling can expand to everything, and we can become vulnerable and open to others telling us what is good and right for us and not trust our own knowledge and instincts.

5) Don't change. This is the most dangerous rule of all. Change is threatening to those around us, because if we change then they will have to change. But if we don't change, we don't grow and if we don't grow, we die slowly but surely.

So there is pressure from INSIDE – we are feeling crazy. There is pressure from OUTSIDE – the rules. What do we do?

We must break the rules!

We must talk about the death of our loved one. In Worden's words, we accept the reality of our loss. By sharing the story of our loved one and our individual feelings surrounding it - that they are gone and will not return and that reunion in this life is impossible. We not only absorb reality, but when we also hear our stories of this being told by our very mouths, we begin to heal. Denial and hope for reunion is normal immediately after a loss; however, this illusion is usually short-lived.

We must feel. People try to avoid the painful feelings in various ways such as "being strong," moving away, avoiding painful thoughts, "keeping busy," etc. We must allow ourselves to experience and express our feelings. Normal emotions during this time could be: anger, loneliness, anxiety, guilt, and depression. A key to feeling "the pain of grief" as Worden states, is being able to recall and relate to both pleasant and unpleasant memories of the deceased. Ask friends and family for support. Tell

“We can choose not to risk, not to change, but we must remember that in doing so we are choosing not to grow, not to mature.”

them what you need from them as people very often misunderstand the needs of the grieving. Be assured that the memory of your loved one will continue, but the pain will lessen in time and will eventually disappear.

We must think about a new life without the deceased in it. Resentment and fear often rear their ugly heads at this time, as it is difficult for a survivor, especially widowed persons, to take on new roles that were formerly performed by the deceased. There will be many practical daily affairs you may need help and advice with, "adjusting to a new environment" as Worden would say, but there will also be a sense of pride in being able to master these challenges. Emotions involved in letting go are painful but necessary to experience and live. We must acknowledge and express our feelings or else we could become numb. Unexpressed feelings don't go away. They fester within our bodies and cause disease.

We must change and grow. The final task is to affect an emotional withdrawal from the deceased person so that emotional energy can be used in continuing and building a new productive life. We

do have choices. We can choose not to risk, not to change, but we must remember that in doing so we are choosing not to grow, not to mature. We are not dishonoring the memory of our loved one and this does not mean that you love him or her any less. It very simply recognizes that there are other people and other things to be loved – and that you are capable of loving, again. Reinvest in your life.

At Northern Illinois Hospice, we recognize that each person grieves differently, and we have created several different bereavement support groups to allow for this. Some people can accomplish their grief-work with family, friends, or civic/church support. Others may need a "safe place" as in a group-setting, to share their stories of love and loss. Still others may need to express their feelings and emotions through the arts: writing, journaling, coloring, meditation and mindfulness, mandalas, guided imagery, or virtual dreams, to name a few. Throughout the year, we offer different groups or workshops to address the many ways we grieve.

I will be presenting at the International Death, Grief and Bereavement Conference in La Crosse, Wisconsin, this coming June. My topic/theme is: "Going on a bear hunt...We've got to go THROUGH it!". I will share information on several of these newer ideas of working through grief. We tend to talk our way through our grief (which is very important) but some need to express their grief-journeys in different ways.

I am always open to hearing your story of what worked for you. I'd love to meet over coffee and share your grief-journey! Call or email me, I'd love to hear from you.

2017 Bereavement Support Groups & Workshops

Open to anyone who has experienced the death of someone close to them, our groups and workshops focus on learning, healing and encouragement. Conversation topics include: understanding grief and mourning, common myths about grief, available resources, the importance of community, helping others to heal ourselves, and self-care. All are welcome. Pre-registration is required for groups and workshops. Call 815.398.0500 or email: avitale@niha.org for more information. Locations of groups and workshops will be shared during pre-registration.

Please note: new members may join during the first and second meetings of any 6-week session. Sessions less than 6-weeks are open to anyone who would like to join; however, sessions build upon themselves, so it is best to attend all of them.

Healing Community Grief Support Group (6-weeks)

Tuesdays mornings, 10-11:30 a.m.
Beginning on April 25

Wednesday evenings, 5:30-7 p.m.
Beginning on April 26

Children and Teens Grieve Too! Workshop

(open to ages 6-17)

Saturday, June 17

9:00 a.m. – Noon

Remember When...

Memoir/Journaling Workshop

Three Monday mornings, 10:30 a.m. - Noon

Beginning on June 12



Learning to Create Rituals

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your ritual. Rituals can be serious, or solemn, whimsical, or light-hearted. When doing rituals you can toss rules to the wind and judgments aside. Do what feels right for you.

Below are some ideas for rituals:

- Wisdom passed on from others, written down in a journal or put on a sheet of paper and framed and placed on a wall. Engrave it on something special or even make it a tattoo. Quotes your loved one shared help you to transition to life after loss;
- Taking part of a community ritual such as Memorial Day, Veteran's Day, All Saints/All Souls Day;
- Planting a rose bush, plant, or tree in memory of your loved one;

- Lighting a dedicated candle on a given day or other special days and giving yourself permission to allow your mind to wander to stories about your loved one;
- Creating a memory scrap book, including photographs, quotes, postcards, and notes, from the life of your loved one;
- Listening to his/her favorite song or watching one of their favorite movies;
- Making a donation to a charity your loved one cared about or was involved with; or,
- Making an annual pilgrimage to the burial site of your loved one to spend time chatting with them.

“Life is change; growth is optional; choose wisely.”

– Karen Kaiser Clark





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“When a person is
born, we celebrate;
when they marry we
jubilate; but when
they die we act as if
nothing happened.”

– Margaret Mead