

Journey

Spring 2020

A grief community publication
from Northern Illinois Hospice



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COVID-19 and Some Reasons Your Grief May Feel Worse

As stories of the virus continue to invade our personal spaces via news or television or social media, our feelings will oftentimes spike and our minds take over. We create horror stories in our minds of what might happen — when in actuality they most likely will not. So if you are feeling these things, please rest assured you are not alone in this. We're all feeling this fear. None of us have ever been in this place before.

We are meaning-making creatures and we tend to create some sort of image or story that connects to our fears. Unfortunately, most people tend to stuff painful stories deep inside. Our grief is no different.

So remember that we are all stressed. Grief can take everything we've got, but add to that a crisis when you're already running low, then everything in our storyline now takes more energy and life becomes more challenging.

A fear that many of us may have is that, due to the current crisis of the corona virus, you find yourself

not thinking as much about your loved one, and guilt creeps into the storyline. Our brains can only store so much and, like a hospital, it begins to triage what's most important to protect us. This happens in the beginnings of our grief as it is the body's way of self-preservation. Know that this will eventually equal out and things will again level out.

The opposite is true as well. Perhaps you can't think of anything but your loved one. Not only do we miss them in good times, we also miss them in bad times. Turning to what they may have told us during this time, how they may have settled us down in times of distress. We can find strength in things they taught us or modeled for us. This is something we can be bolstered by and be comforted.

During this time of "stay-at-home" and social distancing, it can also create a sense of loneliness.

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From the Bereavement Coordinator

Welcome Springtime!

Spring is (hopefully) finally here and it's a good time to get outside and allow nature to do its healing on us.

Walks outside can increase our serotonin levels which fights anxiety and stress, both feelings that come with grief. Spring is also a great time to do some 'cleaning,' personally, physically, and emotionally.



Living in Rockford, the Swedish idea of *döstädning* comes to mind, which translates to "death cleaning." *Dö* means "death" in Swedish and *städning* means "cleaning."

This act of death cleaning is one of slowly beginning to declutter so your death isn't such a burden for those you leave behind. It can also help us with our grief journey. How often do we gravitate towards collecting stuff? We collect and collect and collect things that find places in our homes — and usually collect dust! Other than some possible sentimentality, do they really need to be a part of our lives? Usually not.

The season of Lent also is one that asks of those participating to reduce stuff in our lives, to prepare a pathway. In taking time each day to look and reflect on our lives and the 'stuff' in it, we can begin to recognize what we need to keep — and what can be lovingly tossed. It's not a time for throwing things away, but to recognize that many of these things are important to us, but we no longer need them (physically on a shelf or mentally in our bodies) in our lives.

Take some time during this Spring to look around you and reminisce but also take some action as to what you can "let go" of and allow yourself to continue to grow! It's not an easy task but a necessary one in our adult lives. We not only can do this with physical things, but we can re-visit feelings and emotions that no longer serve us well — and toss them too! I offer you this paraphrased quote: "Try not to over complicate things. We're only here for a short time. Once this day is over, it's gone forever. The space in your mind (and in our homes!) is too valuable and precious for you to fill it with nonsense."

Peace.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew J. Vitale".

Andrew J. Vitale, CT
Bereavement Coordinator/Spiritual Counselor

Ask an Expert

Q: I'm having a lot of anxiety because of coronavirus. Please help!

A: First, know you're not alone — we get it. It's hard to sift through all the messages and information being thrown at us. Worse is the unknown (not knowing what you don't even know) can cause even greater anxiety for any of us. Things to do: Remember that knowledge is power. Don't accept everything you read or hear. Arm yourself with information — the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides information and frequent updates on COVID-19's spread, risk, etc. (www.cdc.gov) Lastly, get your emotional support system in place. Maintain routine as much as possible, stay connected with others via email, social media, video, and telephone.

COVID-19 and Some Reasons Your Grief May Feel Worse

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Remember this is about keeping our distance, not dropping out of sight. We should be encouraged during this time to reach out by phone, or using other technology, like Facebook, Skype, or Zoom, to actually see others while we chat with them and communicate our hopes, fears, and dreams for the future. Remember we are not confined to our homes, apartments, condos, but are able to go out — step outside your door onto your patio or balcony — and get some fresh air (don't stay cooped up!) but continue to practice social distancing. Sunshine is a good thing for all of us, plus an excellent source of Vitamin D.

We also imagine that life would be better if they were still here. We do this in grief work. It's normal. But we tend to wish this more when things get rough and life is difficult. We need to be aware of this — if we ignore this — it can oftentimes make our grief more difficult, or we become bitter or resentful in grieving the IDEA of what might have been (the woulda-coulda-shoulda's).

I am sure there are many other things this crisis will bring up that can magnify your grief, but know that you are not alone in this. We're all afraid — but together — we can steer through our grief.

Please realize you're grieving the life you once had that has been taken from you. Grief is exhausting. Please know you are not alone! We're all in this chaos together.

If you need someone to talk with, please remember we're here to support you through your grief and this troubling time. Call 779.774.9820 or email: avitale@niha.org.

2020 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. All are welcome. Pre-registration is required. Please email avitale@niha.org or call 779.774.9820 to RSVP. Events and opportunities are updated on the Northern Illinois Hospice website under the "Grief & Healing" tab — check them out!

Due to COVID-19, all bereavement group activities are subject to change. We are exploring Grief Support groups via telephone or Zoom. If this interests you, please contact Bereavement Coordinator Andrew Vitale, CT at 779.774.9820 or avitale@niha.org.

Mindful May

A Collaboration with Anderson Japanese Gardens
Mindful Meditation, Grief & Resilience.

Due to COVID-19, this group has been post-poned. Please call 779.774.9820 if you're interested in participating.

The Birdhouse Project — For the Guys

(See article to right)
Friday, June 12, 2020
9 a.m. - Noon
Space is limited. Please call 779.774.9820 to RSVP.

Monday Morning Mandalas

Drop-in gatherings (no RSVP). Join us as we spend time relieving grief and stress, centering ourselves, as we color Mandalas (simple expressive art). Monday mornings on June 15, 22, and 29 from 10-11 a.m. at Northern Illinois Hospice, 4751 Harrison Ave., Rockford.

Mindful Moment

Research shows that multitasking on the job diminishes both our efficiency and quality of our work. Even worse, multitasking releases the stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline, which can lead to all kinds of health problems. — Mark Coleman



It's a "Guy Thing...." The Birdhouse Project

As we approach June, we will also hold a special hands-on event for Men who are grieving.

Men grieve differently than women. As such, Northern Illinois Hospice invites those males (ages 21 and up) to join us for a three-hour gathering. During this time we will take part in a project-based experience to help attendees move past the loss, shame, grief, fear, or anger that has them paralyzed in the present time. This experience will stir the emotions of the heart, then guide the mind through a process of reconnecting each step of the healing process to a specific piece of the birdhouse. Through reflective thoughts and by facing our limits, we take ownership of our feelings and emotions and express our struggles, strengths, and dreams in the birdhouse.

It is never too late to pick up the pieces of our lives and put them back together. It is never too late to create a safe space to host new life.

Gentlemen, please join us for this special event.

Friday, June 12, 2020
9 a.m. - Noon
Northern Illinois Hospice
4751 Harrison Ave., Rockford

Call Northern Illinois Hospice at 779.774.9820 or email avitale@niha.org to RSVP. Space is limited.



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*Pause.
Grab some fresh air.
What's outside?
Scan the vista for two or
three signs of spring.*