

## June

### Bereavement Services

*Providing grief counseling and education for patients, families and the community*

### Suggested Resources

#### Music (CD)

*Before Their Time*  
[www.beforetheirtime.org](http://www.beforetheirtime.org)

#### Books

*Surviving Grief and Learning to Live Again*  
**By Catherine M. Saunders**

*Grandparents Cry Twice*

**By Mary Lou Reed**

*A Broken Heart Still Beats*

**by A. McCracken and M. Semel**

*Funds in support of this newsletter have been provided by Corning, Inc., Four County Electric Care Trust, Inc., and Wilmington Funeral & Cremation.*

## Grandparents' Grief

by Jean Roney, Bereavement Counselor

Being a grandparent can be one of the most wonderful rewards of raising children and growing older. Often special bonds develop between the grandparent and grandchild. Grandchildren carry the family into the future. However, sometimes these children's lives are tragically cut short. Families are then robbed of this special family member by his or her untimely death.

The death of a child is perhaps the most difficult loss ever experienced. It disrupts the entire family structure, throwing it into emotional chaos and disorganization. Not only are parents and siblings affected, but there is also a profound effect on grandparents and other family members. All surviving family members and friends have to process the reality of such an untimely death. Even if the child had been diagnosed with a terminal illness, the news is often received with a response of shock and disbelief. Denial can be especially strong because adults do not expect to outlive a child. The death of a child defies the natural order of what's supposed to happen in life. It is never "fair" or "right." In fact, it is very "wrong" because the old are supposed to die before the young. It leaves older adults struggling with the question,

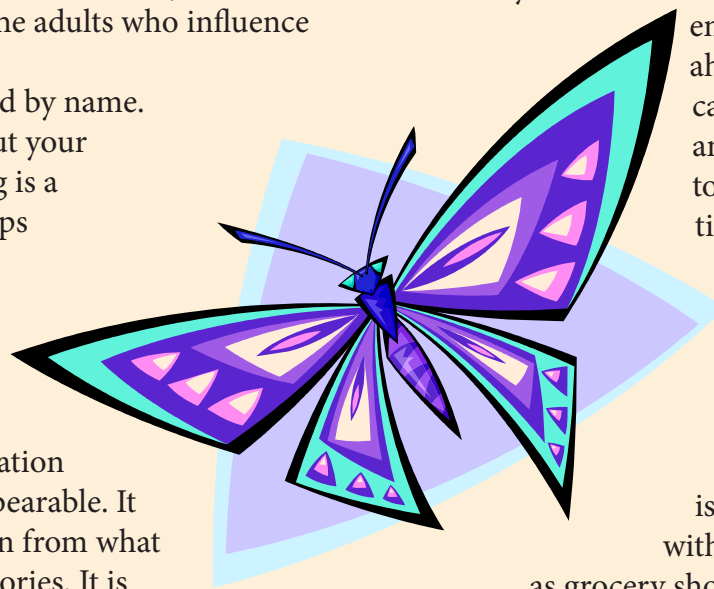


"Why?" Frustration and intense feelings of helplessness, anger, and blame are normal reactions after the death of a child or grandchild.

When grandparents outlive a grandchild, it complicates the grieving process in many ways. A grandparent must not only deal with his or her own grief, but also must cope with the grief that his or her spouse and other family members have. The emotional pain experienced as a result of the personal loss, along with the concern for the adult child, the adult child's spouse, and other surviving grandchildren can often seem unbearable. Grandparents who take on the role of family matriarch or patriarch may suppress feelings of grief in order to appear emotionally strong for other family members.

# Suggestions to Help Grandparents Work Through Grief

- Give yourself permission to grieve. Allowing yourself time to work through your own personal feelings will enable you to be more effective in supporting other family members. Remember, grieving is a healthy response to loss. Avoiding or suppressing the emotional responses of grief can lead to unhealthy coping and actually prolong the mourning process.
- Cry as often as you need. Do not feel that you cannot cry in front of your adult children or other grandchildren. Families who can support and comfort one another by talking openly and honestly about what they are feeling and experiencing, and who can cry and laugh together often form stronger bonds. Younger children are then able to learn healthy reactions and coping skills from the adults who influence their lives.
- Mention your grandchild by name. Reminisce and talk about your grandchild. Reminiscing is a therapeutic tool that helps substitute memories for the physical presence of a deceased loved one. The ability to reminisce is what helps make the physical separation from a loved one more bearable. It can help remove the pain from what at first are difficult memories. It is amazing how often, after a period of time, some of the memories which once caused tears and sadness will be replaced by feelings of comfort, joy, and love.
- Utilize your support system. Who do you have you can talk with about what you are experiencing? It could be a close friend, a pastor or rabbi, a counselor, or members of a support group. Find someone who will listen and be there to comfort and support you.
- Attend grief groups offered in your community, or be willing to drive to a location where such groups are offered. Grief groups provide a “safe



place” for individuals to gain support from others who have experienced similar losses. Education is provided which helps normalize what participants are experiencing. Lower Cape Fear Hospice & LifeCareCenter offers excellent grief education throughout the year. Classes may not be presented specifically for grandparents, but those offered, such as Living With Grief, Adults Who Have Experienced the Loss of a Child, or Loss & the Holidays, will provide valuable information and support. Compassionate Friends also offers support for parents (and grandparents) who have experienced the death of a child.

- Realize that special times of the year (holidays, birthdays, or death anniversaries) will be emotionally difficult. Plan ahead for those times. What can you do to help yourself and other family members to cope better during those times? Work through your own emotional pain, but also be available to help your adult child and other grandchildren.
  - If you live close to your adult child who is grieving, offer to help with practical matters such as grocery shopping, spending time with siblings of your grandchild who died, or spending time with your adult child. However, realize that individuals grieve in different ways. Just listen without trying to “make it better” or “fix things.” Don’t force your expectations of how to grieve or how long grief should take on your child or other surviving grandchildren. Allow them to grieve in his or her own way. Be sensitive, supportive, and loving.
- Take care of yourself. Stay current with medical checkups. If you are able, exercise on a regular basis. Get plenty of rest. Be sure you are eating nutritiously. Do something special for “you.”

- Realize that grief is “work.” It would be nice if “time healed all,” but grief takes hard work, lots of support, and time. Grief resulting from the death of a grandchild will take much longer than you expect. Therefore, it is important to engage in activities that will help ensure healthy grieving.
- Read about grief and loss, journal your emotions and experiences, start a scholarship fund in memory of your grandchild, donate monies to a charity, plant a tree or a “memory garden,” or create a memory book. Actively engage in “doing” while you are grieving.

An article on the grief of grandparents from The Compassionate Friends Web site, [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org), describes how difficult grief can be for grandparents because they love both the grieving parents and also deeply loved the grandchild who died. Healing and resolution can come. But it will take a lot of work and more time than ever imagined. Allow yourself personal time to grieve, work through your pain, and be vulnerable with other family members so you can support each other during your time of grief.

## Ask the Counselor

by Susan L. Strickler, M.Ed.  
Director of Bereavement Services

**Q:** *I went through my grandson’s funeral in a daze. Honestly, the only part of the ceremony I remember is wishing I could crawl inside a beautiful yellow rose on the altar. I don’t remember anything that the priest said. Now I feel guilty.*

**A:** You were probably still in a state of shock and denial at the service. Our minds have wonderful ways of taking care of us when we are on emotional “overload” which is what your mind did when it focused on the flower. You might ask the priest if he could make you a copy of his sermon or notes. Relieve yourself of your guilt. Trust that your mind and emotions took care of you in the best possible way at the time.

## How Can I Help Hospice?

Lower Cape Fear Hospice & LifeCareCenter could not exist without support from the community. We are often asked, “What can I do to help hospice?” There are many ways, and all of them are important. Each gift of money, time, and good works on our behalf is appreciated more than you can know.

- Share your positive hospice experience with others, especially your physicians. Thank your doctor for referring your family member or friend to receive our services.
- Invite an agency representative to speak at your church group, civic club, or business meeting.
- If you own a business or service, sponsor an event or donate a service or an auction item for an event that benefits Lower Cape Fear Hospice & LifeCareCenter.
- Volunteer your time and talents. Volunteers work at events, in the offices, and assist with patients and families.
- Thank those who volunteer and support hospice in any way. It takes the efforts of everyone involved to make our organization the best it can be.
- Contribute financially through tributes, contributions, sponsorships, and estate giving.

For more information, visit the Foundation page at [www.giftofhospice.org](http://www.giftofhospice.org) or call the Development Office at 910.796.7900.

## Grief Groups Begin Soon

Connecting with others can lessen the intensity of grief. Our bereavement counselors offer hospice families and community members grief assistance.

**Living With Grief**, a weekly support group for adults coping with grief, will be held Tuesdays, July 26 – Aug. 30, from 10 a.m. to noon at Saint Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southport and Wednesdays, July 27 – Aug. 31, from 3 to 5 p.m. at Seaside United Methodist Church in Sunset Beach

To register, call 910.754.5356 and leave your name, phone number, and the session you wish to attend.

Additional grief groups will begin in September in Wilmington and Whiteville. Call 910.796.7991 for information or visit Events at [hospiceandlifecarecenter.org](http://hospiceandlifecarecenter.org).



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## GRIEF SUPPORT

*Lower Cape Fear Hospice & LifeCareCenter Bereavement Department offers a variety of services for individuals who are grieving, including those listed below. Thank you for allowing us to participate in your grief journey.*

Most of us have loved and lost special people in our life, and we understand that coping with grief is a challenging process.

If you are having difficulty dealing with the loss of a loved one, our Bereavement Services staff are the people you can call for help. They provide grief counseling to patients, their families, and the community through individual and group sessions.

Our bereavement counselors offer grief support in many ways. **Grief counseling** is offered to hospice families usually up to 13 months after a death. Short-term **individual counseling** is available for people in the community who have experienced a death, even if it is not a hospice-related death. Community organizations and businesses can arrange for **presentations** on grief topics. **Workplace programs** are available that describe how grief affects employees and ways to cope with grief after an unexpected death.

### GRIEF SUPPORT FOR ADULTS

Throughout the year, support groups are offered to adults in our community, regardless of whether they received hospice services, as well as to families of our hospice patients:

- Living With Grief
- Living With Grief – For Men Only
- Adults Who Have Had a Parent Die
- Adults Who Have Had a Child Die
- Loss and the Holidays

### SUNRISE KIDS

Children and teens grieve after the death of someone they love, and they often grieve differently than adults. Our Sunrise Kids program addresses the needs of children and adolescents who have experienced the death of someone in their lives. Bereavement counselors provide support to young people as they cope with emotions and changes that may be difficult, confusing, or frightening. Behaviors and feelings that occur in a typical grieving process are explained, along with ways they can be safely expressed. This is necessary before young people can begin to reinvest their energies into their own futures.

**In-School Program:** Our Sunrise Kids staff work with school counselors who make referrals and facilitate support group sessions within some schools across Bladen, Brunswick, Columbus, New Hanover, and Pender counties. Children learn they are not alone by interacting with others facing similar experiences. They identify and express personal feelings related to their loss and develop coping skills.

**Individual Counseling:** An expressive arts therapist is available for individual counseling, where young people are encouraged to use their creative ability to get in touch with their feelings. Artwork is used to help capture memories, emotions and create a direction for the future. Within the school setting, a licensed clinical social worker is available for consultation with school counselors about the needs of individual students who have experienced a death.

**Sunshine Camp:** Creative, week-long summer day camps for children ages 7-12 encourage children to express feelings through play, art, recreation, and small group discussion. They benefit by sharing experiences with their peers.

*The programs and services are free of charge (with the exception of a \$25 Sunshine Camp supply fee), and donations are appreciated.*