



# Healing Journey

A NEWSLETTER TO HELP THE GRIEVING PROCESS

October

## Bereavement Services

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

*Funds in support of this newsletter have been provided by:*



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## The Loss of A Child

Parental grief is particularly intense and is probably the most long-lasting grief of all. With the death of your child, you not only have lost that particular child but also hopes, dreams, expectations, fantasies, and wishes you had for that child. You grieve over losing parts of yourself, parts of your family, and parts of your future.

### What do parents lose when a child dies?

#### 1. The Loss of Illusions

Our belief that we can protect our children too often turns out to be an illusion. No matter what the circumstances of the death, no matter how impossible to prevent or beyond your control, you hold yourself responsible.

#### 2. The Loss of a Piece of Yourself

The more we have invested in our child, the more we lose and your child's death robs you of a central piece of yourself.

#### 3. The Loss of Order in Our Universe

Parents are older, children are younger. Children will grow up,



parents will grow older and die, and the children will bury them. The order of the generations is deeply embedded in our thinking. A child's death violates this order.

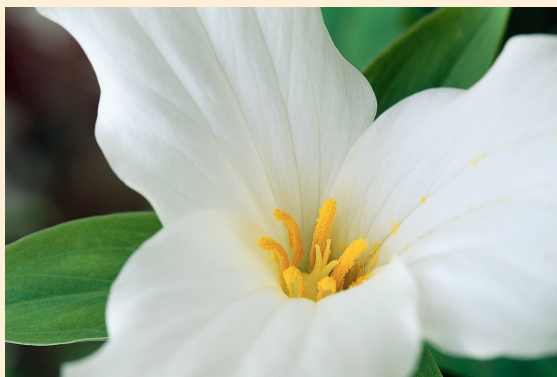
#### 4. The Loss of the Future

A child's death robs you of your future. You lose the pleasure and pride that comes from watching your child's life unfold.

## What Is Necessary to Resolve Your Grief?

First of all, you are going to need to acknowledge and understand the death of your child if you wish to deal with your grief and have the world continue to maintain some order for you. It is necessary to experience the pain of your grief, even though you cannot be blamed for wanting to avoid the pain of grief. You can try to deny it, avoid thinking about the loss, overfocus on other family members' grief and not pay attention to your own, or even keep yourself so busy that you don't feel the grief. This can backfire for if you want to someday have as fulfilled life as possible, you must go through the pain.

Another challenge is readjusting to life without your child. You must get used to the new world



and move into it in ways that reflect the fact that your child is no longer in your life as he or she was before. Movement toward adapting into your new life does not mean you forget your old life. It means you develop a new relationship with the person who died, keeping your loved

one “alive” appropriately. There are many healthy ways you can hold on to your child, for example, continuing to reserve special times you had put aside for each other, displaying certain mementos, talking about your child, thinking of memories.

The last focus would be to reinvest your emotional energy into other relationships, activities, and roles that give you joy and satisfaction.

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## Workshops to Help Ease Holiday Grief

Our one-session Loss & the Holidays workshops offer adults, children, and youth ways to accept limitations, cope with grief, define realistic expectations, and create new traditions during the holidays.

### Loss & the Holidays for Adults

- Tuesday, Nov. 8, 10 a.m. to noon, Saint Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church
- Wednesday, Nov. 9, 3 to 5 p.m., Seaside United Methodist Church
- Thursday, Nov. 10, 6 to 8 p.m., Angel House Hospice Care Center
- Tuesday, Nov. 15, 10 a.m. to noon, Phillips LifeCare & Counseling Center
- Wednesday, Nov. 16, 6 to 8 p.m., Phillips LifeCare & Counseling Center
- Tuesday, Dec. 6, 2 to 4 p.m., Phillips LifeCare & Counseling Center
- Thursday, Dec. 8, 6 to 8 p.m., Phillips LifeCare & Counseling Center
- Thursday, Dec. 8, 6 to 8 p.m., Angel House Hospice Care Center
- Tuesday, Dec. 13, 10 a.m. to noon, Saint Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church
- Wednesday, Dec. 14, 3 to 5 p.m., Seaside United Methodist Church

### Teen Loss & the Holidays

- Wednesday, Nov. 16, 6 to 8 p.m., Phillips LifeCare & Counseling Center – for high school teens
- Thursday, Dec. 8, 6 to 8 p.m., Phillips LifeCare & Counseling Center – for middle school teens

**Pre-registration is mandatory.** For more information or to register, call 796.7991 or 796.7925 for New Hanover County sessions; 754.5356 for Brunswick County sessions; and call 642.9051 for Columbus County sessions. When leaving a message, please leave your name, phone number, and indicate the specific session you wish to attend. Donations are appreciated.

## Indicators of Unresolved Grief

Behaviors that may be indicative of unresolved grief can include:

- Formal behavior that masks intense feelings of anger
- Development of physical symptoms that your child experienced in illness
- Furious hostility toward specific people connected with your child's death
- Chronic guilt and lowered self-esteem
- Feeling that the loss took place yesterday, even though it occurred months or years ago
- Loss of patterns of social interactions, interruption of friendships and formerly valued social activities
- Searching that continues over time, with a great deal of apparently purposeless behavior or restlessness
- Panic attacks, physical expressions of fear
- A relatively minor event triggering a major grief reaction
- Self-destructive and self-punishing behavior
- Radical changes in lifestyle

Keep in mind that what is extreme and uncharacteristic behavior for one person can be well within the limits of normalcy for another. Ethnic and religious background also shapes our determinations of normal and appropriate behavior.

## Ask the Counselor

by Susan L. Strickler, M.Ed.

Director of Bereavement Services

**Q: *I can't seem to control my anger after my daughter died. Why is this so and what can I do about it?***

**A:** Parental grief is vastly different from all other griefs. You may have particular problems with some of your grief reactions because of this kind of loss. Usually parents experience some anger at the death of a child because it violates the very order of nature. It also severs the parent-child bond which is intense. Your anger may also come about when others start to avoid you because they feel uncomfortable.

The death of a child also creates many secondary losses which can also create anger. What can you do about this anger? Find someone you can talk with – whether it is a family member, friend, minister, or counselor. Recognize that you will need some solitude for healing. Allow and support quiet time (which is different from withdrawal). Try a physical activity like walking or gardening. Attempt to do some journal writing and talk about your anger.

Finally, take the freed-up emotional energy that used to be invested in your daughter and reinvest it in other relationships or activities. Doing this does not mean that you won't keep your daughter's memory alive and continue to relate to her.

**Give the Gift of Hospice:** Your gift of hospice allows us to provide our special kind of comfort and quality end-of-life care to patients with a life-limiting illness. Your donation enables families and friends to receive emotional support when losing a loved one. Your generosity to Lower Cape Fear Hospice & LifeCareCenter makes it possible for us to provide professional bereavement counseling to grieving children and adults.

For more information, visit [www.giftofhospice.org](http://www.giftofhospice.org). Thank you for your support.



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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 provisionally 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 Sunshine Camp supply fee), and donations are appreciated.*