



Healing Journey

A NEWSLETTER TO HELP THE GRIEVING PROCESS

Live Well. Every Moment Matters.

December

Bereavement Services

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

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Hope - A Powerful Healing Tool

No one likes to grieve. Yet it is the very act of grieving that leads you back to life. It is only by allowing yourself to feel badly that you can finally come to feel good again. So what can you do as you go through this transition? Among other things we've previously mentioned, you can hope.

You can hope that when you integrate this loss into your life that you will still feel connected to the person who died while still being apart. You can hope that others will be there for you when you



need them and when you need to attempt what you haven't tried before, courage will be present in equal measure.

Never forget that hope is one of the most powerful tools you have. With hope, you can heal. With hope, you

can venture forward. And with hope, you can find a way to carry with you warm memories of the one you miss and love.

How Long Does Grief Last?

Most everyone who has ever grieved wonders, "How long will this grief last, and how long will I feel this sorrow and pain?"

As a culture, we want everything to be quick and easy. We want the magic fix. Like all else that we hurry through in life, we want to get through our pain as quickly as possible.

So, how long does it take? The real answer is that it is an individual thing. Grief takes as long as it takes – a week, a month, or a year or more, depending on whom we lost, the relationship we had with this person, our personality,

and how this death affects us. It is a process we move through, and it will eventually erupt in some way.

What does getting over grief mean? We don't really "get over it," but we learn to live without pain. We don't forget or stop loving the person who died; we remember him or her without feeling pain.

One of the great rewards of grief counseling is to see our clients reach the point in their grief journey where they find the courage to recover and heal.

*Sue Strickler, Director
Bereavement Services*

Who Am I Now? Bereaved Partners Face the Unknown

One million Americans are widowed yearly – and those numbers are growing fast, fueled by the ubiquitous Baby Boomers. The Social Security Administration projects that by 2010, nearly 1,050,000 Americans will lose spouses each year, and by 2030 that number is expected to grow to more than 1.5 million. And these figures don't factor in deaths of partners in committed non-traditional relationships.

Those left behind face redefining their lives to deal in new ways with family and friends, as well as unresolved feelings and regrets left over from marriage, according to Dr. Morton Lieberman, director of the Aging and Mental Health Program at the University of California at San Francisco, in his book, "Doors Close, Doors Open: Widows, Grieving and Growing."

A brochure provided by AARP's Grief and Loss Program advises, "As time progresses, you will feel less intense pain, but you will not forget. You will never be your old self again (you have had a major life change), but you can be a different self who is 'OK.'"

Statistically, the job of rebuilding is left to wives. Sixty-nine percent of people left behind when a spouse dies are women. According to the National Vital Statistics Report, currently 500,000 widows are under the age of 45 in the U.S., many with children, leading to more complex issues. Older widows with little education or financial means sometimes surprise themselves and everyone around them by bucking the odds and starting over.

Men who are widowed face a different set of stresses, proven by their death rate, which is three times higher than that for women in the same circumstances, according to AARP. Typically, men have two things working against healing: They don't expect to live longer than their wives, and their socialization and training tell them that they should be strong and silent. Often they have lost the only person in the world to whom they are comfortable confiding their feelings at a time when it is critically important to have someone to talk to.

When Michael Goshorn's wife was diagnosed with cancer, the couple found plenty of information online about her disease and support groups. So, when she died, he turned to the Web again, but this time he didn't find what he needed about widowhood for men. So he created www.WidowNet.org to offer information and self-help. The site includes a message board and sections with titles like "Dumb Remarks and Stupid Questions" and "Getting Through the Holidays," as well as links to help men grapple with their new identities.

Often widows seek assistance from a professional counselor who can help deal with intense feelings of anger, a feeling many people say takes control of their lives. They often are angry at everyone and about everything. Counselors help widows realize that these feelings "aren't weird, that they aren't going crazy." Finding some reason in the life that remains is hard work. Most know that they will never get over their loss, but understand they will be able to live with it.

Portions of this article were adapted from www.findingourway.net.

Upcoming Grief Support Offered by Bereavement Services – Join Us!

Adults Who Have Had A Parent Die: Weekly groups for adults coping with a parent's death.

- Wednesdays, Jan. 11 – Feb. 15, 6 to 8 p.m., Phillips LifeCare & Counseling Center

Adults Who Have Had A Child Die: Weekly groups for adults with grief from a child's death.

- Sundays, Jan. 15 – Feb. 5, 2 to 4 p.m., Phillips LifeCare & Counseling Center
- Mondays, Feb. 6 – March 12, 6 to 8 p.m., Seaside United Methodist Church

Living With Grief: Growth and education groups for adults coping with grief.

- Tuesday, Jan. 17 (one-session workshop), 6 to 8 p.m., Angel House Hospice Care Center
- Thursdays, Jan. 19 – Feb. 23, 12:30 to 2:30 p.m., Phillips LifeCare & Counseling Center
- Mondays, Feb. 6 – March 12, 2:30 to 4:30 p.m., Seaside United Methodist Church
- Tuesdays, Feb. 7 – March 13, 10 a.m. to noon, Saint Peter Evangelical Church

Program Locations

Angel House Hospice Care Center: 206 Warrior Trail Rd., Whiteville

St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church: 4843 Southport-Supply Rd. SE, Southport

Seaside United Methodist Church: 1300 Seaside Road SW, Sunset Beach

Phillips LifeCare & Counseling Center: 1414 Physicians Drive, Wilmington

To register, call 910.796.7991 for Wilmington sessions; 910.754.5356 for Brunswick County sessions; and 910.642.9051 for Whiteville sessions. Please leave your name, phone number, and indicate the specific session you wish to attend.

Widowhood Q&As

Q: Should I still wear my wedding ring?

A: There is no such thing as “wedding ring etiquette.” Do what makes you most comfortable. Some widows place their wedding rings on their right hand; others remove their rings to save them for future generations. Some have their rings fashioned into a special new piece of jewelry and others wear their rings all their lives.

Q: What should I do with my spouse’s clothes?

A: This is a special concern to most widows. Trust yourself to know when the time is right to dispense with the personal belongings. Some people give them to family and friends, others to charitable organizations. This task doesn’t have to be done all at once. It usually helps to go through belongings with a friend or family member so you can share memories and stories – it may make the task less distressing.

Q: How can I get others to talk about my deceased spouse?

A: People are afraid that any mention will make you sad. They feel uncomfortable and don’t know what to say. You can help them and yourself by sharing memories of your loved one with them. You might open the door by saying, “Remember when Jim ...?” Or be direct and simply say to friends and family that you want to talk about your loved one and want others to do so, too.

Q: How can I get through birthdays, anniversaries, holidays and other special events?

A: For most people, special occasions are difficult, especially the first ones following a loved one’s death. Anticipate that they may be difficult and prepare yourself. It’s fine to put traditions in mothballs to be recycled when you feel stronger, or to create new traditions. Try a diversion, such as a family trip or volunteering time at a social service agency that helps others during the holidays. Visit the cemetery or site where your loved one’s ashes were scattered. Prayers, toasts and other tributes in your loved one’s honor also may be helpful.

Q: When should I start dating?

A: The traditional one-year period of mourning is usually observed. However, some people may choose to seek companionship earlier – and some may never choose to do so. Only you will know when the time is right. It’s important to remember that you are vulnerable and to be cautious.

Q: Should I attend a bereavement support group?

A: Everyone needs help from others during times of intense grief. Most people rely on the support of friends and family. Some seek counseling from clergy or other spiritual advisers. To find a support group, contact Lower Cape Fear Hospice & LifeCareCenter (see next page). Support groups aren’t for everyone. So if you try and it doesn’t feel right or seem to help, don’t feel badly about dropping out.

Q: How will I know when I’m getting better?

A: Many experts encourage widows to keep a journal. Periodically reading earlier entries provides tangible evidence of improvement. As one participant in a chat room for young widows said, “You know you are getting better when you wake up one morning and don’t have to force yourself to breathe.” Another milestone is when you can talk about memories with a smile instead of tears. Remember that things will never be the same, but you can and will feel happiness again.

Memorializing Loved Ones

Contributions to Lower Cape Fear Hospice Foundation may be made in memory of individuals. Often people make donations on birthdays, holidays, or other special days to commemorate their loved ones.

Gifts help Lower Cape Fear Hospice & LifeCareCenter fulfill its mission of providing health care and comfort to people with life-limiting illness and offering support services and education to patients, their families, and the community.

To make a donation, visit giftofhospice.org or call the Development Office at 796.7962.



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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

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

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.