



Healing Journey

A NEWSLETTER TO HELP THE GRIEVING PROCESS

Final Issue

Bereavement Services

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

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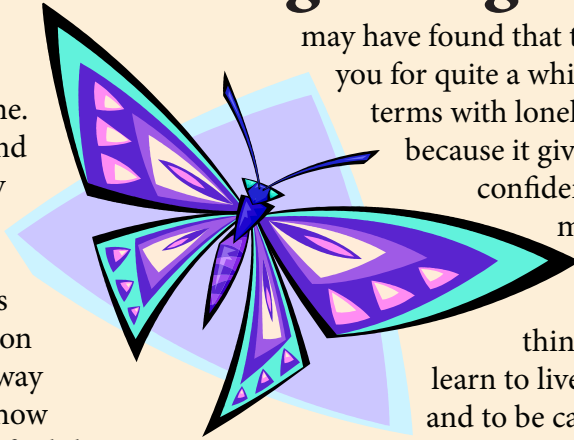


Moving On – New Beginnings

We began this *Healing Journey* together at the time of the death of your loved one. You were freshly bereaved and were feeling what is typically called the first stage of grief—shock and numbness. Now we will review the steps or phases of grief that a person generally goes through as a way for you to become aware of how far you have come. You may find that you experienced some of these steps and not others because the grief process is so individual.

Despite preparation, it still comes as a shock that a person is about to die. When the actual death occurs, you are numb, sleepwalking through the necessary events that follow a death. Do you remember that numbness and how that inability to feel strongly about the death is probably the very reason you were able to function at all? Sleepwalking through the funeral or memorial service, comforting friends, and everyday events like eating and sleeping—all make the early days a blur in your memory.

As the numbness wore off, a period of emotional turmoil followed. You might have felt feelings like anger, resentment, guilt, bitterness, or fear to varying degrees of intensity and duration. Regrets like “If only I had...” also may have bothered you, but hopefully you found that those self-recriminations changed nothing and moved on from that place. Loneliness, despair, and depression are typical emotions, and you



may have found that they were with you for quite a while. Coming to terms with loneliness is important because it gives you the confidence that you can make it on your own, completing everyday, normal things. You had to learn to live with loneliness and to be careful not to lean

too heavily on someone or something else in order to become a stronger person. Filling up the emptiness that comes as a result of the death of a loved one occurs gradually and almost without our noticing that it is happening.

Hopefully, you remembered that the bereavement process takes time and were patient with yourself. You may also have had individual counseling or participated in one of Lower Cape Fear Hospice & LifeCareCenter’s support groups. Having support of that kind from professionals and hearing from other people who have experienced a loss is very helpful.

You had to come to terms with a new identity for yourself. If your loss was a spouse, you had to find a new identity because you were no longer a wife or husband. If you buried a parent, your challenge was to become a motherless or fatherless person and define what that meant to you. If you buried a child, you had to bear an unbearable pain and redefine yourself without that child in your life.

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You have probably had to learn how to do things—take care of finances, learn to cook, or do laundry—that seemed impossible at the beginning but which now may give you joy and confidence because you overcame an obstacle.

Very likely, you were given advice from friends and relatives who wanted you to get back to being the old you because they were so very uncomfortable with the pain that defined the new you. In time, you probably were able to forgive them as you came to understand that they did the best they could to comfort you. Or, you may have had to reconstruct friendships with new people who could relate to the new person you have become.

The last phase is called “accommodation,” which occurs when you’ve done all your crying and grieving for the most part, and you feel you are on a more even keel again. Some of you may not be at that point yet, and that’s okay. You’ll get there when it’s the right time for you. You will still feel lonely and miss the person. That’s to be expected, for you will never be the same again as a result of the death of your loved one. You may find that you still have the same problems as when the death occurred, but they have become substantially easier or more manageable.

You may have experienced a significant improvement in your ability to function in the world and in your personal life. These improvements provide you with a greater sense of well-being, self-esteem, and life satisfaction.

Perhaps the surest sign that you are recovering is when you begin to take an interest in life again. You have a renewed spark to do things you haven’t done for a long time. You may have momentary feelings of guilt because that renewed interest in life may seem disloyal to the person who died.

This time of life may be when you start a new career, pursuing a dream that you didn’t make time for before. You may discover talents that had remained buried but which you can now nurture.

Some people say they will no longer take anything for granted and they appreciate life to a greater degree than before. More words of love get expressed to the living by those who find

that they can’t say, “I love you” to the one who is physically gone.

Other people say they have decided to be there for others who are grieving in the way they wish it had been for them. Taking someone out to lunch or being a listening ear to a grieving person causes a remarkable thing to occur. Giving to another person, going out of yourself, repeatedly facing your pain and tragedy—all of these activities challenge you to deal with your own grief to make you stronger.

You have come to realize the fact that death is a part of life that can’t be avoided and it is common to all. We do not often see the growth that can come from some experiences until they are over. Rising to the occasion as death occurred in your life and overcoming the difficulties that followed have made you a stronger person.

Ask The Counselor

Q: I know it is silly, but I feel guilty that I can laugh again. Is this normal?

A: Grief can be so devastating that we think we will never live through the pain, much less smile again or laugh. But time does its magic, and one day, we are surprised to discover that we have just laughed. This can be a time of confusion and even guilt for some survivors. When our loved one dies, we love them so much and miss them so much we are numb and can’t feel. So when we do laugh, we often question if this somehow means we don’t love the deceased anymore or if it is disloyal to the person’s memory. We say to ourselves, “She (he) was such a wonderful person, I have no right to feel good about anything yet.”

The reality is that laughter has great healing power. It is a gift. Even in great trauma or crisis, the world can be quirky, and it is natural to laugh again. Grieving is a time of healing for your heart and soul. To be able to laugh can be a sign that you are healing and are beginning to feel again. It does not mean you have stopped loving the deceased. It means you are beginning to transcend your grief and return to life.

Surviving the Anniversary of Death

When someone we care about dies, our lives are changed forever. We cannot measure the enormity of the loss and the pain. There is no timetable for grief. It's different for everyone. The depth and duration of grief depends on the relationship with the person who died, the support you receive, and your ability to effectively work through your sorrow.

As the anniversary date of the death comes near, your heart may break all over again. The approaching days and the anniversary day will be painful. It's a fact. You may feel anxious and experience a sense of dread. Your body may respond with headaches and other physical complaints, sleeplessness, nightmares, and irritability. Subconsciously you will relive the events surrounding the death. It may be frightening and confusing but the inescapable fact is that as the calendar year unfolds, THAT day will always be a reminder. Here are some ideas that may help you cope:

- Remember above all else to be gentle and patient with yourself and others.
- Don't place any expectations on yourself. It is not realistic to expect that you will get through this time without painful memories and the need to cry. You may experience some or all of the initial stages of grief again. Walk through them as gently as you can.
- It may be wise to take the day off from work and if it's helpful, surround yourself with family and close friends. If you want quiet time and

solitude, ask for it. Trust your needs and honor your feelings.

- Take a long walk in the woods, near water, or anywhere you can see the sky and touch the earth. Nature is a powerful healer.
- Remember the deceased in a positive way. You may want to have a simple anniversary service, buy flowers, listen to special music, or dedicate a memorial of some kind to your loved one.
- Rather than concentrating on the death, share the funniest, the most meaningful and delightful stories that you can think of about the deceased. Concentrate on the fact that in love and memory we are always together and nothing, not even physical separation can change that.
- Write thank you notes or make telephone calls to those who have helped you on your journey of grief, no matter how much time has passed. Remember, comfort and support is available from family and friends. When we need a hug or someone to talk with, call them.

The only chance to make our way through grief is to respect and honor it. There is no curfew for healing. If we fail to grieve, and instead close down our hearts, we cease to grow, to deepen in compassion and understanding. Grief is a powerful teacher and after having experienced it, we can help others.

Giving the Gift of Hospice

Has the *Healing Journey* been helpful to you on your grief journey? Next month, you will be receiving a survey about this publication, and we would love to hear your comments, thoughts, and suggestions.

Healing Journey has been made possible in part through support from our generous sponsors. Donations and grants to Lower Cape Fear Hospice & LifeCareCenter help the agency, a nonprofit hospice in southeastern North Carolina, provide quality end-of-life services and programs to friends and families throughout our community. By giving the gift of hospice and joining a Circle of Caring, you make it possible for others to benefit from our services as well.

Many opportunities are available to memorialize a loved one and support Lower Cape Fear Hospice & LifeCareCenter. They include the Safe Passages Tile Wall in Wilmington and Bountiful Life Tile Wall in Whiteville. The Closer to Home Capital Campaign offers numerous naming opportunities in the new Brunswick County Hospice Care Center. Or you can leave a lasting legacy by naming the Lower Cape Fear Hospice Endowment Fund in your estate plans. Please call Lower Cape Fear Hospice Foundation at 910.796.7900, e-mail lcfhfoundation@lcfh.org, or visit the Foundation page at GiftofHospice.org for more information.

We wish you well on your healing journey.



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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.