



THE SEASONS OF GRIEF

A newsletter for the bereaved as they journey through the loss of a loved one



GRIEVING DURING COVID-19

Written by Orley Culverhouse M.S.W., R.S.W., M.T.A.

What makes this time so difficult?

We are living in a time of uncertainty. For many, life has been turned upside down in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic. For those who are bereaved, the experience of grief can become more intense when coupled with the fear, anxiety and uncertainty we are all facing. It is important to acknowledge that we are grieving far more than the death of a loved one right now. The losses are unending: for example, many have lost finances, jobs, the opportunities for social connection, life events and celebrations, rituals, and routines. In many respects the way we viewed our assumptive world, or our way of “making sense” of the world has been lost.

Grief can be an extremely isolating experience at the best of times, which has been further compounded by the limitations on being physically present with others. If someone in our lives has died in recent months, we have also likely had to change the traditional ways we would have mourned. Perhaps a funeral service either was not possible or has been delayed, we were not able to spend time with loved ones prior to, or at the time of death, or see the body after.

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International border closures may have prevented us from being with our significant person while they were ill or is separating us from family now while we are grieving. We may feel angry or frustrated that we were forced to be separated during these precious last moments. This may make it more difficult to feel that the death is real or bring up feelings of regret, anger or even guilt.

Social gatherings, special events and celebrations- all things that bring us hope, comfort, joy, connection and purpose - may have been cancelled or postponed. We are still being encouraged to be physically distant from one another in order to save lives.

Gentle Suggestions for Support During This Time

Name and Acknowledge Your Losses

We are surrounded by loss right now. For many people, it can be helpful to reflect on and actively name the losses we have experienced and how those losses are impacting us. Even as we slowly have our supports, social gatherings, and freedom of movement returned to us the experiences and impacts of the pandemic may echo throughout our grief journey.

Make Time for Grief

If possible, resist the urge to put grief and mourning “on hold”. We may not be able to mourn in the ways we are traditionally used to, but perhaps there are ways we can still express our grief. Some examples: planning a funeral or services for a later date, creating a memory book, starting a new ritual at home for our loved one such as lighting a candle, creating a memorial at home or in our yard, talking about our grief experiences with loved ones you trust, going for a walk, visiting somewhere that connects us with our loved one, journaling, educating ourselves about grief, finding an online community for bereaved people, connecting with our spirituality/religious practices, and so on.

Listen to Your Body and What You Need

This will look different from person to person. It could be having alone time to decompress, getting frequent exercise, spending time engaging in hobbies like cooking, visiting loved ones, curling up with Netflix/ a good book/or a pet, sticking to a routine or taking a break from social media.

Avoid Emotionally Isolating

Allow support from others and stay connected with loved ones (e.g. text, phone call, email, FaceTime, letter writing, etc.). As we have begun to see restrictions lift we may feel comfortable meeting up with friends or family for a walk, a coffee or a visit.



CARING HEARTS CHILDREN'S CORNER

The nicer weather may allow us to visit in the fresh air and maintain a safe distance from one another. We can also reach out for professional support. Many agencies, including St. Joseph's Hospice, are providing support by telephone, video calls and in-person to the Sarnia-Lambton Community.

Practice Self Compassion

It is important to acknowledge that we are in the middle of a global crisis. It would make sense if we are not functioning at 100% right now. Sometimes all we can do is survive from day to day and that is completely okay. We could all benefit from being gentle with ourselves and practicing non-judgement with how we are coping.



caring hearts children's corner

SUMMERTIME AND GRIEF

Children are often considered the "forgotten mourners" and it is important for us to facilitate conversations with children about their grief. A child's first language is play and so it makes sense that when trying to talk about grief we incorporate play, games and art. Here are two summertime activities provided from *The Dougy Centre For Grieving Children and Families* that people of ANY age can do to help them cope with their grief.

Bubble Messages:

Bubbles are a great way to share memories and messages in a group or on your own, while also being outside. As a group, invite people to say a memory or a message to the person who died out loud or to themselves while they blow a bubble. This is also a good option for children to do on their own whenever they want to say something to the person who died.

Sidewalk Chalk Memories:

For this activity all you need is a sunny day, some chalk, and a sidewalk or driveway. Whether as a family or individually, people can draw pictures of summer memories with the person who died or write messages. For those who struggle with painful images or regrets, they can write or draw those and then use a hose or a bucket of water to wash them away. Acknowledging and then intentionally erasing those images and regrets may help lessen their intensity.

"Finding You in the Beauty"

*The rays of light filtered through the trees this morning,
I thought of you.*

*I discovered you tucked in the shadows of the trees and the waves on the beach,
In the skipping of pebbles along the water's edge.*

Then, rediscovered you

*In the smiles of the flowers as the sun penetrated their petals,
In the rhythm of the leaves falling in the garden,
In the freedom of the birds as they fly searching as you do.*

I'm very happy to have found you,

Now you will never leave me,

For I will always find you in the beauty of life.

Author: Walter Rinder



IN THE PRESENCE OF ABSENCE

Written by Kellie Webster M.A., R.P., C.T.

As humans, we are hard wired to seek, crave and yearn for connection to others. It is our primal instinct, which is reinforced at birth when we connect to our primary caregivers, as we rely on them for survival. As we grow, we begin to form other connections with people within and outside of our families; a connection of our choosing, bonded in love. When someone important to us dies, it can leave us feeling isolated from the relationship we once shared with them because we can no longer physically see, touch or hear them. As a result, we begin to experience varying degrees of feelings, thoughts, emotions and physical responses known as grief.

When grieving, we, the survivors, find ourselves in what Alan Wolfelt describes as, 'liminal space' – the space between what was, and what is yet to be. This ambiguity can be hard for us to hold when we are grappling for something, anything, we can control in such a changing time. Our brains can sometimes be "fixed" with ideas or ideals of how we should be grieving or living. This can leave us feeling that we must cling to the past in order to remain connected to our loved one or it may lead us to "avoid" thinking about our loved one altogether.

Grief exists on a continuum; it is not a fixed state. There are many layers of grief and it is a fluid experience of continuous ebbing and flowing. There are ways we can create space to hold both the weight of our grief and the relationship we shared with our loved one.

When death occurs, a life ends, not a relationship. This is what Klass, Silverman and Nickman (1996) refer to as 'continuing bonds'; the continuity of relationship with our loved ones after they have died. There is a shift of relationship with the deceased, and as relationships are always evolving, death also presents the opportunity for evolution of relationship. Much like the seasons shift, we too are constantly shifting both throughout life and in our grief. The winter may seem long and dark, but the spring brings new light to the world around us. We too, can slowly build new connection as we softly surrender the physical bond and submerge our energies into new realms of relationship. It is a gentle unweaving of the old connections and re-stringing them into our present-day world.

It is in the presence of absence where there is opportunity to fuel connection; we shapeshift into a new state where relationships transcend all physical time. It is unreasonable to think that we can turn off the love and connection we once shared when death occurs. When we continue to allow for that relationship to grow, we allow the love and bond we shared to be present.

Connection can be bred from many different sources. Simple things can be done such as talking to them, sharing stories about them, preparing their favourite meal, letter writing, sensing their presence, going to their favourite park, participating in rituals, memorializing, having their picture out, hugging an article of their clothing. There are many opportunities to integrate and maintain relationship and connection over time; and that will look different for each of us because each of our relationships are unique. When we continue our connection, through our words, thoughts or actions, a part of our loved one can take shape and remain with us. In doing so, the vibration of their love can permeate and become entwined in the present moment in a very powerful way that can transcend all of time.



*"When we surround ourselves with memories, for a moment we are pulling them from our minds and back into our embrace."
-unknown*





SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

Family Members of our Residents

We continue to be here for you. Our Spiritual and Supportive Care Counsellor will be calling you 1-2 months after your loved one's death to provide support and discuss our Supportive Services available to you. If you have any questions before, please do not hesitate to contact our Supportive Services team.



BEREAVEMENT SERVICES

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, we have had to adapt our programs in order to deliver them safely. We are currently offering our bereavement services by telephone, using video calls or in-person.

Adult Bereavement Support Groups

Peer Support Groups are an opportunity to come together with others who are also grieving, share your story, learn about grief, develop coping skills and participate in memorializing activities. Sometimes asking for help is the bravest move you can make. You don't have to grieve alone.

Bereavement Counselling

Bereavement counselling is available for those who are grieving the death of a significant other, regardless of the cause of death. The focus of counselling will be on grief and the effects of loss. Counselling is also available for children/youth ages 6-18. Art, play, games and music are incorporated into the sessions as children are encouraged to express their grief, learn about death and dying and develop coping strategies to foster resiliency.

PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR UPDATES ON OUR SERVICES:

www.stjosephshospice.ca

St. Joseph's Hospice Resource Centre
475 Christina St. N. Sarnia, Ontario N7T 5W3
Email: supportiveservices@sjhospice.ca
Telephone: 519-337-0537



CONTACT US

To sign up for our quarterly bereavement newsletter, for more information on our services or to schedule an intake assessment to determine which program will be most helpful to you please email us at supportiveservices@sjhospice.ca or call our Supportive Services Coordinator at 519-337-0537 ext. 123.