



THE SEASONS OF GRIEF

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



*"Grief is like a snowflake...
sometimes it comes one flake at a time;
other times it is like a blizzard.
It melts away, but it always comes back.
Just as each snowflake is unique,
each person experiences grief in their own unique way"
-Julia Cook, 2011*

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HEALING THROUGH GRIEF

Written by Kayla Slegers, hBA. CLSt. Dipl., CCLS

Grief is a natural and normal response to the loss of something or someone you love deeply. Grief is experienced through an array of thoughts, feelings, and sensations. Often, people think of grief as the many difficult emotions that arise. In addition to our emotional reactions grief can be experienced physically, mentally, socially and spiritually. Each person's grief is unique, dynamic, and changes in intensity as it ebbs and flows. Remember, there is no right or wrong way to grieve, and it takes courage to embrace grief as it comes without trying to fix, change or cure it.

An important task in bereavement is mourning, which means making choices to outwardly express one's grief through actions, rituals, and personal expression. Mourning helps to acknowledge grief, offers a sense of release, creates opportunity to honour your special person and can help one feel connected to the deceased by continuing the relationship with them. Just like grief, acts of mourning will be unique to you and your personal beliefs and values. Healing will occur when you chose to mourn with meaning and purpose. Remember, you don't need to mourn alone- reach out for help and find people in your life that will listen to your grief, your story, and support you in a non-judgemental way by listening to your pain and suffering.

Mourning a loved one never really ends, nor does grief. People do not "get over" grief or the death of a loved one, rather the hope is that you begin to learn to live with the grief and loss. As you navigate your grief journey, you can integrate your grief and loss into your "new normal" – your life without the physical presence of the person who died. Grief experts may refer to this as reconciliation.

With reconciliation comes a restored sense of energy and confidence, an ability to acknowledge the reality of the death and a capacity to become reengaged in the activities of living. As you work toward reconciliation you will find a renewed sense of meaning and purpose in living.

Mitch Alborn writes in *Tuesdays with Morrie* "Death ends a life, not a relationship". When someone very special in your life dies, they don't vanish from your life nor do you want to forget them. They played a special part in your life for many reasons.

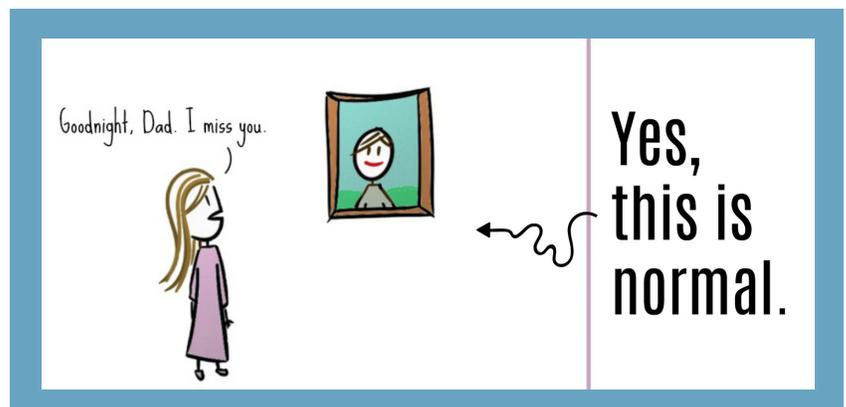


image from <https://whatsyourgrief.com/grief-concept-care-continuing-bonds/>

Honouring and remembering them is an important part in your grief journey. Additionally, you may find comfort in choosing to continue the relationship with your person, known as a continued bond. Continuing the relationship with your loved one requires adjustment and redefining the relationship. This can be done through participating in activities you once did together, holding space for their presence, communicating with the deceased such as through letter writing, dreams or talking to them. There are many other ways you can continue your relationship; through traditions and rituals shared by your community and family, and by choosing activities that are unique and meaningful to you and your person.



caring hearts children's corner

KIDS GRIEVE TOO

Written by Jody Woodcock BA, BSW, RSW

Children from birth to young adulthood are growing and changing. Just as children are physically changing, so too does their ability to understand death and grieving. They are continually trying to make sense of their world and children differ from one another in their knowledge and abilities. Even the youngest children know and react to the changes that happen in their families when someone dies. Although children's responses to grief may look different than adults, children grieve too.

Children may struggle to understand that all living things will someday die, that death is irreversible and definite or that a person's body no longer functions after they die. It is important that caregivers listen carefully to the questions that children ask about death and dying so that they can understand the concepts of death they are struggling with. In turn, they will then be better prepared in knowing how to help their children.

Caregivers can help children learn about death and grief through conversations, sharing their experiences and reactions to grief, and by normalizing common grief reactions. Engaging in these conversations with children through play, art and writing can also provide great opportunities to dialogue with children.

One simple way to find out what your child understands about death and grief is to ask. "Wonder, Wish and Hope" is a simple three-sentence completion activity to get caregivers and children talking about grief. Children can finish the sentences by talking, writing words, or drawing a picture about what they wonder, what they wish and what they hope.

I wonder when this "grief" is going to go away?

I wish I didn't feel so different.

I wonder why did this happen to me?
To my family?

When my dad died, I wish people had told me it was okay to cry, to be scared, and to miss him. I wish they asked me how I felt and what I wanted to do?

For more information about the "**Wonder, Wish and Hope**" activity visit [The Dougy Centre](#).

For more information about the **Child and Adolescent's Experience of Grief** visit <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/en-ca/support-friends-and-family/grief-library/a-childs-view-of-grief>

SELF-COMPASSION DURING DIFFICULT TIMES

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

When we are going through a difficult life transition, it can be a challenge to be kind to ourselves when we wish things could be different or that we could feel different. Often, when dealing with the multi-dimensions of grief, we fall victim to judgement. This judgement comes both from others, and self and can act as an additional barrier to our ability to move through our grief experience as it is. It is not uncommon to think, “Why can’t I just get over this?”, “Is this normal?”, “I wish I could just...”. These thoughts and many more, are some of the ways we judge ourselves when we are going through a hard time, which can make us feel more isolated in our grief.

Kirstin Neff, researcher, and well-known author might have the antidote to self-judgement: self-compassion. Neff describes self-compassion as our ability to notice our own suffering and to respond to ourselves with the same care and kindness we would respond to a good friend if they were going through a similar experience. She explains there are three components to self-compassion: self-compassion vs. self-judgement (being gentle with oneself when facing difficulties or painful experiences), common humanity vs. isolation (recognizing that we all suffer; suffering does not happen to individuals in isolation) and mindfulness vs. overidentification (having the ability to respond to our situation with a broader perspective, in a non-judgmental way) (Neff, 2020).

When we are going through difficult times, a self-compassionate response calls us to be gentle with ourselves, as opposed to responding with the rigidity we may be culturally “programmed” to respond with. Our self-talk is often laced with many layers of fear, doubt, and desire for control that we are not able to see that a softer approach can be what we need most. Sometimes our reluctance to approach our pain and suffering from a gentler place can make our experience harder because it contributes to the resistance of our pain (through judgment). In addition, when grieving we are often depleted and have little energy to give which can contribute to our feelings of overwhelm.





When we can lean into our pain, there is opportunity to grieve with care, rather than diving in headfirst and becoming overwhelmed by our grief. Our ability to foster self-compassion through painful experiences is valuable both in how we will move through our experience but also how we care for ourselves throughout the process. Perhaps the most poignant part of self-compassion in relationship to grief, is the idea of “common humanity”; grief is universal and no being on the planet escapes it as death is an inevitable part of existence. This knowing can help us understand that we are not alone in our painful experiences and can help us both in the moment and as we journey along in our grief.

The next time you find yourself judging your experience or resisting it, remember, it is okay to feel the way you do. Take a moment to yourself, a deep inhale and exhale and imagine how you would treat a good friend who was feeling the same way. You have permission to put yourself first, speak kindly to yourself and respond with care when you are going through a difficult time. I hope you can find moments of nourishment and compassion for yourself today.

Neff, K. (2020, Dec 29). What Self-compassion is. <https://self-compassion.org/the-three-elements-of-self-compassion-2/#definition>

SELF-COMPASSION BREAK

This is an exercise you can try the next time you are feeling overwhelmed with your experiences of grief. Gently tell yourself:

This is a moment of suffering.
This hurts. This is grief.

Suffering is part of life.
Other people feel this way. I'm not alone. Grief is universal.

May I be kind to myself in this moment.
*May I give myself the compassion I need. May I be strong.
May I be patient. May I forgive myself.
May I accept myself as I am and my grief as it comes.*

adapted from <https://self-compassion.org/exercise-2-self-compassion-break/>

*For more information on
Self-Compassion visit the website:
<https://self-compassion.org/>*



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 phone or video calls.

Adult Bereavement Support Groups

8 Critical Questions - Virtual

March 10th, 2021 – April 28th, 2021
Wednesdays 6:00pm to 7:30pm

Teen Bereavement Group

March 23rd, 2021 - May 11th, 2021
Tuesdays 6:00pm to 7:30pm

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.

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

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 contact us.

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