



Hospice Bereavement Letter

Fall – 2010

A Service of Whatcom Hospice Bereavement Support Program

The ideas and opinions in this newsletter are offered for your reflection only.
We do not promote any particular philosophical or religious perspective.

Grief reminders after a loss

Adapted from

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/grief/MH00036>

When you lose someone close, your grief doesn't just magically end. Reminders often bring back the pain of loss, even years later. Feelings of grief may return annually on the anniversary of your loved one's death and on special days throughout the year, such as a birthday or religious holidays. Even memorial celebrations for strangers who died in catastrophes, conflicts or disasters can trigger the familiar pain and sadness of your own loss.

The return of these feelings of grief isn't a setback in the grieving process. It's a reflection that the lives of others were important to you and that you grieve their loss and still miss them. Learning more about what to expect and how to cope with reminders of your loss can help make the grieving process a healthy, healing one.

The memories and emotions of a lost loved one that are reawakened through reminders are often called anniversary reactions. These reactions, which can last for days or weeks at a time, can raise a host of emotions and physical symptoms similar to the ones you faced when you were first bereaved, including: Sadness, loneliness, anger, anxiety, nightmares, lack of interest in activities, crying spells, replaying images in your mind related to your loved one, trouble eating, sleeping problems, headaches, and stomach upset.

Anniversary reactions can also evoke powerful emotional memories — experiences in which you vividly recall the feelings and events surrounding your loved one's death. You might remember in great detail where you were and what you were doing, for instance, when your loved one died.

Some reminders of your loved one are almost inevitable, especially during the first year after a death. That's when you'll face a lot of "firsts" — those first special days that'll pass without your loved one. As the weeks and months go by, you may also face other significant days or celebrations without your loved one that can trigger your grief again. Some of these "firsts" and other special occasions that can reawaken your grief include: The first

holiday, Mother's Day, Father's Day or another day you would have honored your loved one, weddings and wedding anniversaries, family reunions, childhood milestones, and other anniversaries of special days. Your reactions to these firsts and special occasions might be intense initially. But as the years pass, you'll probably find it easier to cope — but not forget.

Reminders aren't just tied to the calendar, though. They can be anywhere — in sights, sounds and smells, in the news or on television programs. And they can ambush you, suddenly flooding you with emotions when you drive by the restaurant your wife loved or when you hear a song your son liked so much. Another death, even that of a stranger, can leave you reliving your own grief.

Even years after a loss, you may continue to feel sadness and pain when you're confronted with such reminders. Although some people may tell you that grieving should last a year or less, grieve at your own pace — not on someone else's expected timeline.

Tips to cope with reawakened grief

Time itself may lessen the intensity of your grief. You can also take measures to cope with anniversaries, special days and other reminders of your loss so that you can continue the healing process, including:

Be reassured. Remember that anniversary reactions are common and normal and that the pain fades as the years pass — although it may never go away completely.

Prepare for episodes of grief. Knowing that you're likely to experience anniversary reactions can help you understand them and even turn them into opportunities for healing.

Look for healing opportunities. You might find yourself dreading upcoming special days, fearful of being overwhelmed by painful memories and emotions. In some cases, the anticipation can be worse than the reality. In fact, you may find that you work through some of your grief as you cope with the stress and anxiety of approaching reminders.

Reminisce about the relationship you had with the person who died. Focus on the good things about the relationship and the time you had together, rather than the loss.

Plan a pleasant distraction. Take a weekend away or plan a visit with friends or relatives.

Start a new tradition in your loved one's memory. For example, make a donation to a charitable organization in the person's name on birthdays or holidays, or plant a tree in honor of your loved one.

Tune out. Limit your exposure to news reports about tragic events if you become more anxious, sad or distressed.

Connect with others. Draw family members and friends close to you, rather than avoiding them. Find someone trusting who encourages you to talk about your loss. Stay connected to your usual support systems, such as spiritual and social groups. Consider joining a bereavement support group.

Allow yourself to feel sadness and a sense of loss. But also allow yourself to experience joy and happiness as you celebrate special times. In fact, you might find yourself both laughing and crying.

Anniversary reactions are a normal part of grieving the loss of your loved one. Knowing that sudden intense emotions, memories or physical symptoms may be triggered by dates, places or situations months or even years after your loss may help lessen the pain when they arise. And in the words of grief educator and author, Alan Wolfelt, "people who mourn well, live and love well."

Weekly
Grief Support Groups

Free, ongoing support groups for anyone who has experienced the recent death of a loved one. Come join others in a caring supportive setting with a trained bereavement specialist.

Every Tuesday Evening
7:00-8:30 p.m.

Every Wednesday Afternoon
2:00-3:30 p.m.

Health Education Center
3333 Squalicum Parkway
Bellingham

Annual Celebration of Light

Everyone is welcome to join with others in remembering those you love who have died.

Through story, candle lighting, music and refreshment we will share in the hope and renewal after the death of a loved one.

Monday, November, 15, 3-4 pm at the Health Education Center, 3333 Squalicum Pkwy, Bellingham. Free. For more information, call (360) 733-5877.

My Favorite Imagery

Just Floating ----

*On a cloud as soft as a gossamer wing,
causing no pain anywhere to bedevil my
body –*

*At ever so tranquil twilight time,
no dark night for vainly, desperately seeking
sleep –*

*Silence except for distant choir so faintly heard,
no unwelcome sound to invade my ears to
explode –*

*Covered only with gauze as delicate as an angel's
breath,
no garments to bind this tortured flesh-*

No thoughts

No time

No aching

No fire

Just floating

And floating

And floating

By: Haroldene Ward

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If you have comments, suggestions, or would like to submit a poem or article, please contact Bereavement Coordinator, John Robinson, at Whatcom Hospice 360-733-5877 or E-mail: jrobinson2@peacehealth.org