Finding the Courage to Reach Out

How often have friends or family members offered, “If you ever need anything, just call.” Your friends and family want to help, but they don’t know how. Unfortunately, when you feel most unable to reach out, others need you to tell them how to help you. You need to be proactive in finding the support and help you need during this time of transition.

In many ways to build a diversified support system:

1. Recognize that no one person, no matter how caring or concerned, can meet all of your needs. As you begin to identify the family members and friends who want to help, think about how each person can best help you, based on the nature of your relationship and how he or she has supported you in the past. Sort out the good listeners from the “movers and shakers,” and those who are more comfortable with practical tasks. All of these people may play a role in your network of support. The key is to know what tasks are most appropriate for each person.

2. Tell people what you need. Most people struggle with this task because you must be willing to be vulnerable at the risk of appearing weak. Experience shows that the strongest people are those who recognize their need for assistance and seek out the help they need. Muster your courage and help.

3. Educate others about grief as a natural healing process and tell them about your grieving experience. Explain how you need support, companionship, or practical assistance during the healing process. Remember, the general public knows very little about grief and has no idea how to help someone who is grieving. People really do want to help, but they simply don’t know how. Sharing your Grief’s Journey bulletins with your family and friends often can be a successful tool to educate your loved ones to help them understand you and your grief better.

4. Consider participating in a bereavement support group. Groups bring people together in a safe, confidential forum where common concerns and feelings can be expressed more freely. Join a group that is facilitated by professionally trained bereavement counselors and is specifically designed to meet the needs of grieving people. Contact your local hospice for loss support groups in your area.

“The nothing about death, is quite as scary as the exhilarating terror of trying to accept life”

Barbara Davidson

Join us at one of our annual events

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All of these events are open to the community.

For more information, contact the Hope Bereavement Center at (760) 431-4100

Dear Friend

Although grieving is a natural healing process, it’s hard work. Often, it is easier to talk about finding hope for the future and an appetite for life than it is to do it. However, the necessary healing process requires you to face the flood of disruptive emotions that follow the death of your loved one.

While you grieve, it is important to remember that you are engaged in a healing process. Grief’s Journey is designed to help you move through this difficult transition, offering information about the grieving process, suggesting practical tips for coping with your grief.

This issue of Grief’s Journey emphasizes the importance of finding your own path through grief. Your path is unique to you; it is your personal pilgrimage through your pain to new hope for the future. Like any pilgrimage, yours has a social aspect as well as a personal aspect. Many grievers find support and comfort in connecting with others who have lost loved ones.

We believe that support can ease your burden by making grief a little less lonely, confusing and frightening. Although you must find your way through your grief, you need not do it alone. We hope you will find support through Grief’s Journey.

A Path Through Grief

Our paths through grief are as individual as snowflakes and can vary greatly from one loss to the next. Having understanding and words for your experience can help you cope. This path offers a picture of many of the common experiences of grief.

However, because your grief is unique to you, it may not provide an accurate map of your personal path through these experiences.

What feelings will be most difficult for you? How will they affect you? Despite the variances, knowing that others have endured their grief and recovered an interest in life can give you courage as you discover your own path.
THE SEASONS OF GRIEF

Fall
Your disbelief prevents you from accepting what is true; you expect to wake up any minute from this nightmare. It simply can’t be true and you can’t cry because you don’t think they’re dead. Shock helps temporarily. It softens the blow, leaving you dazed and numb. You go through the motions like a robot and your emotions are frozen.

Crying, sometimes spontaneous sobbing and other times quiet tears, gives you release. It gives deep emotions an outlet. Give yourself time for this physical release.

You may not expect your physical symptoms. Your body is not surprised to feel emotions but you may be unprepared for the myriad physical responses so prevalent in those who grieve. You may sleep or eat too little or too much. You may have physical aches or pains and numbness or weakness.

Your heart may hurt; you may experience extreme fatigue and memory problems. Usually the symptoms fade, but check with a doctor to rule out other causes.

With your denial, you tend to separate facts from feelings. You “know” the person has died, yet in your heart you cannot yet accept the death. You forget; you imagine your loved one away for an extended trip, you expect that he will call, or she will come in the door, you search when you are not shopping.

You question, why did she have to die? You repeatedly ask, yet you don’t expect an answer. Your question is a cry of pain.

You repeat your story over and over again. Repeating helps you absorb the painful reality.

You may need self-control to fulfill your responsibilities, do your job, or run the business. You need to moderate your self-control, because although it can give shape and rhythm to your grieving, constant, rigid self-control can block healing.

Winter
When the reality of the death sets in, you may feel that you are becoming because you acknowledge that the death really did happen while other supports may diminish as family and friends expect you to go on living.

Confusion tamps with your sanity. You can’t think and you forget your thoughts mid-sentence. You are disorganized and impatient with yourself.

You tend to idealize and remember only good traits, as if your loved one was perfect. You find it hard to accept your living loved ones who are not perfect.

You identify with your loved one to stay close to him. You may copy his style of dress, hobbies, interests or habits. You may carry or wear a special object or piece of clothing.

Your anxiety increases and you are frightened of losing control or going “crazy.”

You panic about the future, money or other people who could die. Sometimes you feel enlivened – you’ve had a good day! You’re so much better. You can laugh and have fun without feeling guilty. Enjoy these moments when they come; you deserve a rest from your pain.

Your depression may return periodically, sometimes when least expected, sometimes when you least expect it. You may wonder why you thought you were better. You may feel so much you don’t care about anything. Everything is an effort.

Your expectations are important; you may feel you aren’t grieving “correctly.” Your friend was better in a few months – why aren’t you?

It is better not to compare. Expectations – your own or others’ – may add to your burden.

Like most bereaved people, your self-esteem and self-confidence may temporarily fall for below normal levels.

Often no matter what you are doing, you are preoccupied with your loss, thinking of nothing but you and your loved one. You continue to feel intensely angry at yourself, others, medical personnel, your loved one or God. You may feel irritated by everyone and everything.

You feel guilty because you were angry. You are tortured by your regrets. You keep going over real or imagined mistakes in your relationship with your loved one and you feel that no one else can understand.

You are isolated and lonely. You are empty and you want to with draw from family and friends – or they are too busy with their own lives. Sometimes you despair. The agony is unbearable and you feel that you won’t be able to survive. You feel helpless and don’t want to go on living. You want to be with your loved one. Sometimes others mistake these feelings, thinking you are suicidal.

Your sadness seems inconsolable. Unhappiness pervades your life and you miss your loved one’s presence desperately.

You feel helpless and unable to help your self cope with grief.

You feel powerless because you cannot control your feelings.

You see other couples together or children with their parents and you envy their togetherness. It makes you feel keenly what you have lost.

Temporary feelings of bitterness and resentment, especially toward those who are, in some way, responsible for your loss are natural. Habitual bitterness, however, can drain energy and block healing.

Spring
Life may seem like constant waiting. Your struggle is over, but your zest has not returned. You are in limbo, exhausted, uncertain and life for yourself.

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Delaying Grief
Delayed grief may temporarily fall for below normal levels.

A child may not recognize grief (consider how often adults don’t) and may not be able to choose how to express it. He may just feel “weird” – and act weird as a result. Restlessness, hyperactivity, tardiness, truancy, rebellious behavior, and other expressions of grief, will probably diminish with time.

Children live in secret worlds of their own, with fantasies and facts intermingled. Gradually, as they grow, they learn to discriminate fact from fantasy. When a loved one dies, children often fantasize about the cause of death or illness; they may link something they said, thought, or did with the death itself.

Adults need to be cautious about saying anything that might contribute to guilt. This includes using the dead parent as a source of pressure: “Your father would want you to make good grades.” Listening to your children, watching them play, and paying attention to their fantasies help. It also is important to respond to their questions with simple, honest facts in language they understand.

Behavior Changes
A child may not recognize grief (consider how often adults don’t) and may not be able to choose how to express it. He may just feel “weird” – and act weird as a result. Restlessness, hyperactivity, tardiness, truancy, academic problems, stealing, fighting and drug use all may be expressions of a child’s grief, whether they happen soon after the loss or years later.

How can a parent help?
Recognize your limits – you are also struggling with loss. Consider offering your child special support from another adult – a friend, family member, clergyman, or counselor – who can help him work through his grief in a healthy way. Recognize that your child is “bad” but is expressing his grief the only way he knows how. Behavior problems, like other expressions of grief, will probably diminish with time.

In American culture, most people have been taught a set of myths that influence how we deal with death and grief. Some of the myths we learned prevent us from reaching out to others for help when we need them most. In our society, we rarely learn that is good to share our feelings, that our losses change us forever; and that we will need a long time to integrate our loss and pain into our personal identity.

Challenging Grief Mythology

All losses are the same.

All bereaved people grieve in the same way.

It takes two weeks to three months to get over your grief.

Children need to be protected from grief and death.

You will have no relationship with your loved one after death.

It is best to put painful thoughts out of your mind.

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Do not hallucinate.