

Healing the Heart

the experience of grief and loss

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Dear Friend,

The death of a loved one is a painful loss. Sometimes the death is sudden. Sometimes it follows a long illness. No matter what the circumstances, when we lose our loved one our lives are changed forever.

Grieving our loss is more a process than an event. It takes time and that time is different for everyone. The grieving process takes as long as it takes. Grieving is hard work.

A deeper understanding of grief can be invaluable. In this issue we want to identify some of the typical grief reactions that people experience. It is helpful to know that we are not crazy, or “losing it,” or any other response that causes concern. Becoming familiar with typical grief responses helps us to understand our own experience.

I seem to be falling apart.
My attention span
Can be measured in seconds.
I cry at the drop of a hat.
I forget to sign checks.
Half of everything in the house is misplaced.
Feelings of anxiety and restlessness
Are my constant companions.
Rainy days seem extra dreary.
Sunny days seem an outrage.
Other people's pain and frustration
Seem insignificant.
Laughing, happy people seem
Out of place in my world.
It has become routine to feel half-crazy.
I am normal, I am told.
I am a newly-grieving person.

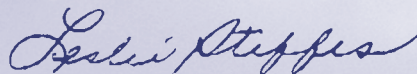
-Anonymous

At the same time, it is true that grief can turn into depression. So, it is also important to be able to distinguish between normal grief and depression. Many symptoms that we identify with depression, such as appetite changes (eating too much or too little) or changes in sleep (sleeping too much or too little), are common symptoms in early stages of grief. Generally, if these symptoms persist beyond three or four months, we recommend that the bereaved seek an evaluation from a physician. Sometimes it is necessary for a period of time to have the assistance of medication to stabilize one's system. Your physician will be able to evaluate what is needed for your care.

As you move through your grief, try to find comfort in knowing that there will be times of happiness and relief – this is okay. You will gradually adjust to your loss. Your life continues on, and your loved one lives on in you – in your memories and in the love that you shared.

Please do not hesitate to call us should any needs develop. We are here to help you.

Wishing you good health and peace,



Leslie Steffes, LMSW

Bereavement Care Coordinator

1-800-248-2298 or 586-723-9590



ST. JOHN HOSPICE

Grief: A Normal Response to Loss

Grief is a normal response to the loss of a loved one. Reactions from grief can affect the whole person. These reactions may include physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and spiritual changes. The most important thing for you to remember is that these reactions are a normal response to a loss.

As you grieve, you may experience none, some, or all of the following physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, or spiritual grief reactions.

Physical	Emotional	Cognitive	Behavioral	Spiritual
hollowness in stomach	numbness	disbelief	impaired work performance	anger at God
tightness in chest	relief	confusion	crying	change in beliefs
heart palpitations	emancipation	inability to concentrate	withdrawal	change in faith
sensitivity to noise	sadness	idealization of the deceased	avoiding reminders of the deceased	change in hope
breathlessness	yearning	preoccupation with thoughts or images of the deceased	seeking or carrying reminders of the deceased	change in view of God
weakness	anxiety	dreams of the deceased	over-reactive	closer to God
tension	fear	sense of presence of deceased	changed relationships	difficulty praying
lack of energy or exhaustion	anger	fleeting, tactile, olfactory, visual, and auditory experiences		distance from God
dry mouth	guilt and self-reproach	search for meaning in life and death		doubting
gastrointestinal disturbances	shame			fearful
increase in appetite, loss in appetite	loneliness			guilty
tight throat	helplessness			prayerful
vulnerable to illness	hopelessness			questioning
restlessness	abandonment			searching for meaning
headaches	loss of control			visions
dizziness	emptiness			
muscle aches	despair			
sexual dysfunction	ambivalence			
tremors, shakes	loss of ability for pleasure			
excess sleep or loss of sleep	shock			

Remember: Grief reactions are expected and normal

Adapted from The Hospice Institute of Florida

Grief versus Depression

It is important to distinguish between Normal Grief and Depression. In the acute stage of loss (about the first three-four months), the symptoms of grief often look like depression. It is generally not a matter of concern. However, if the symptoms persist, it is helpful to know the difference between normal grief and depression. It is not necessary to have all the symptoms of depression listed here to suffer from depression, even a few symptoms suggest a significant concern. Depression will require professional help—a physician and/or counselor—in order to stabilize the emotional and physical aspects of depression that one is experiencing.

Normal Grief	Depression (beyond acute grief stage)
Initially, you may have a change in appetite – eating too little or too much - but your normal appetite returns	Even after 3 or 4 months, you have not resumed your normal appetite; you continue to eat too much or too little
Initially, you may have a change in sleep pattern – sleeping too little or too much - but your normal sleep pattern returns	Even after 3 or 4 months, you have not resumed your normal sleep pattern; you continue to sleep too much or too little
Initially, you may have little interest in normal life activities.	Even after 3 or 4 months, you have little interest or ability to be involved in general life activities
You experience depressive feelings due to the loss of your loved one	You feel little relief from the depressive feelings – they are constant
You are able to respond to comfort and support from family and friends	You find it difficult or impossible to accept comfort and support from those close to you
Initially, you may feel immobilized, but with time you can respond when others initiate an activity	You do not participate in events or accept invitations from others when offered
Your moods go up and down, the roller coaster feelings of grief	You find yourself in a steady state of sadness (or anger), a state in which people or activities cannot change your feeling
You express your feelings of grief – sadness, loneliness, anxiety, anger	You are unable to express your feelings – you either can't find the words or don't have the desire to share
You feel some good feelings sometimes, even joy at times. You can say you are “ok” and it is the truth, not a cover up	Things seem hopeless and a sense of gloom seems to permeate your days
You find yourself thinking of your loved one often	You are preoccupied with thoughts of your loved one, yourself, your grief
You may feel some guilt or blame over certain things related to your loved one	You see yourself as bad or worthless and struggle with ongoing guilt
You may have physical complaints that come and go	You have chronic physical complaints
You experience life as empty	You experience life as meaningless

Bereavement Support Groups in the Community

Healing the Heart Grief Support Groups are offered by **St. John Hospice** to individuals who have experienced the loss of a loved one. The groups provide a relaxed, safe, and friendly environment for people to experience the connecting and sharing that are a vital part of the human condition. The group is an opportunity to experience hope that you will feel better again soon. **Healing the Heart** Support Groups are a free community service. For more information regarding **Bereavement Services**, please call 1-800-248-2298 ext. 39590.

MACOMB COUNTY

St. John Home Care
37650 Garfield, Clinton Township, MI 48036
(586) 723-9590

Meets the 2nd & 4th Tuesday of each month from 6:30 - 8 p.m.
Facilitator: Leslie Steffes, LMSW

St. Augustine Parish Educational Bldg.
68035 Main Street, Richmond, MI
(586) 727-5215 ext 22

Meets the 2nd & 4th Monday of each month from 6:30 - 8 p.m.
Facilitator: Sally Sutley, LMSW

OAKLAND COUNTY

Oak Pointe Church
50200 West Ten Mile Road, Novi, MI 48374
(586) 498-5240

Meets the 1st & 3rd Thursday of each month from 3 - 4:30 p.m.
Facilitator: Jamie Flowers, MA, Chaplain

WAYNE COUNTY

Berean Chapel
8244 Pembroke, Detroit, MI 48221
(586) 723-9633

Meets the 2nd & 4th Wednesday of each month from 4 - 6 p.m.
Facilitator: Rev. André Carr

There are many other places — funeral homes, churches, synagogues, hospitals, private organizations — that offer Bereavement Support Groups for adults and children. To learn more about support groups in your community, you may want to call one of your local organizations or call St. John Hospice for more information.



37650 Garfield
Clinton Township, MI 48036