

Bereavement news for people living with grief



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henryford.com

No time to grieve

By Kathleen Barletta, LMSW, ACSW

When I reach out to bereaved to offer condolences and support after the loss of their loved ones I often hear a common theme: "I don't think it has really hit me yet that they are gone"; or "I have been so focused on doing paperwork and getting affairs in order that I really have not had a chance to grieve." In the early days following a loss, it can be helpful to stay busy on particular tasks, a daily routine or returning to work may be beneficial. Some bereaved have shared that having a sense of purpose or a diversion helps them adjust and deal with the sadness of their loss. I realize that after the loss of a loved one there are several details that need to be taken care of: planning a funeral or memorial service, contacting the Social Security office, reconciling bank accounts, cleaning out loved one's apartment, selling of a home, estate settled. Try to be patient with yourself. The process of getting affairs in order may take several weeks or months depending on the situation. Concerns will undoubtedly come up along the way. You may feel like you are on auto-pilot. Just doing and not thinking about all that has happened. These feelings are valid and normal. You are just trying to make it through and survive a challenging time. Once the majority of the affairs have been attended to, take a deep breath and begin your bereavement aftercare. One cannot begin healing from their loss if they do not take time to acknowledge the pain of the loss (sadness, yearning for a loved one, a missed goodbye, anger, and/or guilt). The more one tries to suppress the loss the more difficult it will be. Acknowledging the loss of your loved one does not need to be a complicated process. Processing loss may begin with talking to a friend or family member about your loss, having a good cry or laugh, journaling, joining a support group, or speaking with a therapist or counselor. I realize that talking about your loss is not an easy task and sometimes it feels very uncomfortable. Self-care is also important during this time. Ways you may nurture yourself are by: buying yourself a cup of coffee, reading a book, listening to

music, hugging your kids, doing something fun. The more you are willing to express your thoughts and feelings in a healthy manner the better able you'll be to integrate the loss into your daily life. By acknowledging the pain of the loss, one can then reflect on his loved one's life. This may include talking about your loved good qualities along with his/her struggles and weakness. Often, when someone dies we tend to talk about them as if he/she were saints. No one is perfect we all have shortcomings. You may need to come to the realization that your loved one had a hard life; made some poor choices, or simply did the best he could. You can choose to hang on to the sadness, guilt, bitterness and anger or choose to take what was learned from those experiences and move forward with your life. Moving forward with your life does not mean your forgetting your loved one. If you had a good relationship with your loved one that strength will remain despite the physical absence. Memories and love never die. Those will always be held close to your heart.

Keep in mind, that each loss one experiences is going to affect them differently. Some losses are more significant than others. Loss is a life changing event, it is not a minor inconvenience. The more significant the loss, the harder the adjustment will be. One may need more or less support depending on the loss. Grief is a process. It is not something you get over; but rather something you walk through. It evolves over time. In the beginning you may be feeling very tender and heartbroken. With a wide range of emotions from sadness, anger and guilt. At that time, you may not have known what you are feeling or what to do next. This is normal. Grief can be a very scary and overwhelming. I promise, you will be okay. I believe in your strengths and capabilities. One step at a time. If you take the time for acknowledgement and reflection you will successfully regain and develop a new life for yourself.

Time to “spring clean” your grief

Excerpts from Megan Meade-Higgins, LMSW

Winter is almost over! Trees are budding, animals are coming out of hibernation-even people are “thawing out” after the long, cold days of winter.

It's time to get ready for spring!

After a loss

The death of a loved one can feel like the bitter days of winter. You go into hibernation and turn inside yourself to cope with the pain and sorrow. It may be months before you pick up your head and look around and realize you've been immersed in your grief for so long that you have tuned out everything else-your family, friends, even the change of seasons. You can only now look around and move a little outside yourself. This is what I call the heart and soul's “Spring Awakening”. It is a time in your grief journey when your heart and soul begin to “bud” with little shoots of “HOPE”-where you can recall your loved one's death and still feel sorrow, but you also begin to remember the joy of your relationship.

“Spring cleaning” your heart and soul

You will feel a momentum inside you when it's time to start “Spring Cleaning” your grief. Many people in your life may think they know what's best for you to start this process. Friends may tell you to “get over it or move on,” often before your ready. But only you will know when the time is right for you. Respect your own timeline for grief; it will be different from everyone else's. Take stock in the “one” year rule: no drastic decision-making or changes.

When you are ready to begin to “Spring Clean” your grief, you will begin to go through your loved one's “stuff”, clothes, belongings, etc. It will be sort of “life in review” for you. As

you look through those papers, clothes, files, and personal items, the things they loved, used and cherished, don't be surprised if it opens sadness all over again. The intensity of this grief may take you by surprise, like an unexpected snow in April. This is normal! Remember: as you go through their belongings, you are NOT giving away the person you are only giving away and throwing out the “stuff”. You can never give them away; your love for them will always be with you. While you are cleaning out your house, you are cleaning out your heart and soul...that is healing. You may reminisce, daydream, and cry, all is healthy.

Spring cleaning” tips

Do “spring cleaning” with someone who loves you and understands this bittersweet time. As you go through your loved one's belongings, tell stories of the life you shared with that person. There is comfort in the shared joy and sadness this task will bring. Sometimes, knowing you are helping others can relieve some of the grief you are feeling. Donate to a charity that had meaning to your loved one, that way your loved one's legacy moves on. Keep your most treasured items to celebrate the life of the person who died, and if you want to display them proudly.

Time by yourself can often be good for “Spring Cleaning” your heart and soul. Alone time gifts you a chance to reflect on your life with your loved one and start thinking about where you are headed. There will never be a “back to normal” but rather a “new normal”. Your loved one will always be with you but in a different way, as you learn to live in world without them physically present there. How will it turn out? No one knows...you cannot control the future or plan too far in advance. Make small changes, lean on friends and family for support, and take one step at a time. You CAN do it!

Behavioral activation

Grieving people who engage in life will have more opportunities to process their emotions, connect, receive support from others and experience positive feelings. What does this mean for you? Engaging in small deliberately planned activities. This doesn't mean “back to normal”. What did you put on hold or stopped because it was too painful? Are you willing to try now that it has been “x” amount of weeks? What can you make time for that brings joy and calm in the moment? By doing, you actually cope with your grief. You feel a “bit” better; Art, advocacy, journaling, visiting

with supportive friends. You develop a sense of mastery which leads to calm, peace, and awaking your physical and emotional well-being. Small steps on a large staircase still gets you there.

Journal prompt: “to allow these feelings room to transform into something else, I am willing to do...”

The grief toolbox

3 ways to use spring to help you through your grief

By Chelsea Hanson

When we're grieving, sometimes all we want is a fresh start. You can't undo your loss, so the next best thing is to move forward. Spring is a time of "Rebirth." It's the perfect time of year to get a fresh start on anything. This Spring, take advantage of the changing season to help you through your grieving process.

1. Make time for spring cleaning

There's something about the beautiful weather and warmer temperatures that makes us want to clean in the springtime. Clean anything; a room, your car, a closet, your entire house, your mind. This is a great opportunity to organize or update your memories. Have a shoebox of photographs you've been meaning to display? Take time to put together a new memorial with the pictures. If you're feeling really ambitious, brighten up your house with new paint colors. Research shows that certain paint colors have an effect on our mood. Freshen up your living room with a sunny yellow accent wall or cover your bedroom walls with a cheery green color.

2. Plant Something

Spring is the perfect time to put your green thumb to the test. If you have room in your yard, plant a memorial garden

in honor of your loved one. If planting an entire garden isn't feasible, start small with a single plant. The growth and beauty of the plants or flowers will give you inspiration each day to live life. Spending time outside will help you to clear your mind and be at peace with your thoughts.

3. Start Something New

There's always more going on during the spring and summer months. Find out what's happening in the community, or think of a new hobby to try on your own. Pick your activity and make time for it at least once a week. Your new activity will give you something to look forward to and will help take your mind off of your loss, even if it's only for an hour a week. The spring months can actually be hard on a grieving person. It's hard to watch everyone else moving forward with the changing season if you're not ready. But keep in mind, just because you're starting something new or changing things up doesn't mean you have to leave anything behind. Your loved one would want you to enjoy the relief from the cold and take advantage of the wonderful things that spring has to offer.

Sanctum

By Beulah B. Malkin

I built a tiny garden.
In a corner in my heart.
I kept it just for lovely things.
And bade all else depart.
And ever was there music.
And flowers blossomed fair:
And never was it perfect.
Until you entered there.



2025 Bereavement support groups

January-June

2nd Wednesday of the month

10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Location:

Henry Ford Macomb Hospital
Medical Pavilion – 4th Floor Meeting Room #6
16151 19 Mile Road
Clinton Township, MI 48038

Monthly: 1/8, 2/12, 3/12, 4/9, 5/14, 6/11

3rd Tuesday of the month

1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Location:

Virtual via Teams

Monthly: 1/21, 2/18, 3/18, 4/15, 5/20, 6/17

4th Friday of the month

10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Location:

17333 Federal Drive, Suite 260
Allen Park, MI 48101

Monthly: 1/24, 2/28, 3/28, 4/25, 5/23, 6/27

SandCastles children's grief support program

SandCastles offers services in Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties, as well as virtually. Call **313-771-7005** or email sandcastles@hfhs.org for more information.



Henry Ford Hospice bereavement services

Offers bereavement support to hospice family members, caregivers and anyone in the community 18 years or older who has experienced the loss of a loved one.

Program offerings include:

- Periodic phone calls
- Monthly newsletters
- Support groups
- Grief education
- One/one support is determined on an individual basis.
- Memorial services
- Community resources/referrals

In general, services last for 13 months, but support can be extended or discontinued. These services are free, with no cost to you.

To learn more about these services please call **586.276.9570** or go to henryford.com/services/at-home/hospice/support.

Henry Ford provides qualified interpreters and other aids and services for the deaf and hard of hearing at no cost.

To request assistance, call Henry Ford bereavement services at 586.276.9570.

A three-day notice is required when requesting an interpreter.