

THE NEXT STEP

A Mountain Valley Hospice & Palliative Care Publication

Volume 1, Issue 4

September 2014

Helping a Spouse through the Grieving Process

Rachel Waddell, Special Contributor (Mount Airy, NC)

When our spouse is sick or injured, we try to help them and provide assistance in their journey to getting well. Some things come naturally for us as wives and husbands, like preparing soup or helping with daily activities. However, there are some situations where the ways to support our spouse are not as black-and-white.

When a spouse loses a loved one, it can truly be a life-changing experience. For many individuals, it is

important for their husband or wife to help them through such a difficult time. So, how do we help our spouse through the loss of a loved one?

First and foremost, it is important to know that everyone grieves differently. Some people want to talk about the loss and some would rather deal with issues internally. Even though we may have lost a parent or sibling, it is best not to assume our spouse feels the same way we did during that time. Avoid using words like,

"I know how you feel," or minimizing the loss by comparing it to your own. Let your spouse grieve in their own way, but let them know that you are there to support them any way you can.

Secondly, be willing to be silent. We often want to share our opinions or lend advice to our spouse in an attempt to help them through their grief. However, we must be willing to listen as our spouse shares his or her feelings. Allow them to talk about anything they

want. Allow them to express the emotion they feel, whether it is sadness, joy, or anger. Allow them to tell stories, laugh, and cry. These are all normal ways of grieving. When our spouse works through grief internally, sometimes our physical presence is all the support our loved one needs. Keep in mind that grieving the loss is not something that can be "fixed." You do not need to have an answer or a response to the situation.

Continued on page 2

Camp Offers "Brighter Days" to Bereaved Children

Josh Armstrong, Bereavement Coordinator (Mount Airy, NC)

On July 15, Mountain Valley Hospice & Palliative Care held its annual Brighter Days Children's Camp at Beechnut Family Campground, for young people who have experienced a significant loss in their life.

The camp is an extension of Mountain Valley Hospice's Kids Path program. The one-day event is offered to children and teens, Kindergarten through 8th grade. It uses a variety of games and activities to teach young people ways to cope with grief and build confidence.

Bereavement Coordinators Ben Webb and Lisa VanHorn organized this year's Brighter Days camp, with counselors coming from Mountain Valley Hospice's Bereavement Department and Volunteer Program. Throughout the day,



Brighter Days camper Birdie shows art she painted in memory of her loved one.

campers engaged in reflective activities, such as creating memory stones and artwork, as well as recreational activities, including swimming and zip-lining. Dog trainer Anne Standen also explained to them how animals can provide comfort during their grieving process, with assistance from her therapy dog Tucker.

The camp concluded with a memorial service for the

campers and their family members. Junior Girl Scout Troop 40070 was on hand to prepare food and decorate the dining area. During the service, campers shared memories of their deceased loved ones, read poetry, and performed sign language to the song "You Raise Me Up." All attendees then participated in a balloon release, signifying the

releasing of their loved ones.

"In the years that I've had the privilege to be a part of Brighter Days Children's Camp, we have seen many types of loss: grandparents, parents, [and] siblings to illness and tragedy" said Kristie Byrd, Director of Community Outreach. "It was amazing to watch the children bond. Where there is common ground, the kids feel comfortable opening up to each other."

A total of 14 children and teens attended the Brighter Days camp at Beechnut. Mountain Valley Hospice also hosted a Brighter Days camp at DeHart Park in Stuart, VA, on June 20, as organized by Bereavement Coordinator Patricia Morris.

Spouse cont.

It is also important to remember that grief is a lifelong process. The year of “firsts” is particularly difficult for many people: the first round of holidays without the loved one, the loved one’s birthday, and the anniversary of their death. Remember that making it through those events does not mean grieving has ended. Your spouse will still have bad days in which the

emotions of missing their loved one are brought to the surface. Grief does not follow a set time line. It is okay to allow them to experience those emotions.

We probably spend more time with our spouse than we do any other person. We often know them better than they know themselves, or so it may seem. Know the healthy and unhealthy habits of grieving. Know that

though it is normal to grieve, there are unhealthy ways to grieve. Know the warning signs like denial, depression, or hoarding. If your spouse expresses that they are feeling “stuck” or becoming depressed, encourage them to seek help in addition to Mountain Valley Hospice’s bereavement services.



Grief Share.org offers daily emails to help one through the grieving process.

Ask the Staff: Coping Mechanisms for Facing Loved One’s Death

Sandra Yates, Bereavement Coordinator (Mount Airy, NC)

Q: What are some coping mechanisms that would be useful in dealing with the death of my loved one?

A: When we lose someone we love, one of the hardest challenges can be dealing with the emotions and feelings from that loss. Often, people choose to resort to addictions that they have used in the past to provide comfort, such as food, alcohol, or drugs. This, in reality, just complicates the loss and masks the pain temporarily.

In an effort to avoid these pitfalls, I would like to provide a few alternatives in dealing with the losses of life:

1. Acknowledge the reality of the loss, while making time for memories and lightheartedness. Recall the things they enjoyed doing and personality traits that bring a smile to your face. A couple of activities to promote this would be working on a scrapbook in memory of them or putting

together a video/slide presentation of their life.

2. It has been said that those who provide joy to others cannot keep it from themselves. Find a worthwhile cause that your loved one might have supported and invest your time and energy into that organization or cause.

3. Invest in yourself. Plan to do things that promote your well-being, whether they be physical, emotional, or spiritual. Don’t just sit at home and allow the grief to rule your life. Get your hair done. Buy a new tool that you would enjoy using. Go to the park with a good book and enjoy the sunshine. If you are feeling angry over the loss, go to a batting cage and hit a few balls. Visit the local recreation center and participate in physical activities for a release of the feelings.

4. Invest in new friendships. Attend a grief support group and connect with those who are also dealing with a loss. You

never know what treasures await as you reach out to others who are also dealing with feelings of pain and loneliness. Remember that lumps of coal become diamonds under pressure.

5. Volunteer. When we invest in others, we often find ourselves and provide for our own nurturing through relationships.

Those are just a few suggestions—stepping stones on your road of grief and recovery. Remember, grief can make us bitter or better... We alone choose!

Have a question? Contact us at mtnvalleyhospice.com/forms/contact, and we may feature it in an upcoming newsletter.

The Elephant in the Room

There’s an elephant in the room. It is large and squatting, So it is hard to get around it.

Yet we squeeze by with, “How are you?” and, “I’m fine,” And a thousand other forms of trivial chatter.

We talk about the weather; We talk about work; We talk about everything else— Except the elephant in the room.

There’s an elephant in the room. We all know it is there. We are thinking about the elephant As we talk together.

It is constantly on our minds. You see, it is a very big elephant. It has hurt us all, But we do not talk about The elephant in the room.

Oh, please, say her name. Please say, “Barbara,” again. Oh, please, let’s talk about The elephant in the room.

For if we talk about her death, Perhaps we can talk about her life. Can I say, “Barbara,” to you And you not look away?

For if I cannot, Then you are leaving me alone In a room—with an elephant.

~ Terry Kettering

The Next Step newsletter and all other bereavement services are offered at no cost to the community, courtesy of Mountain Valley Hospice & Palliative Care. If one would like to make a donation, please contact Sheila Jones at 336-789-2922, or visit mtnvalleyhospice.org/forms/donate.

Bereavement Staff and Support Groups

Mount Airy, NC
336-789-2922
Saundra Yates, M.Div. NCBF
Josh Armstrong, BS
Sarah Tweed, BSW
Ben Webb, BA
Fonda Younger, BS

Pilot Mountain, NC
336-368-1260
Josh Armstrong, BS

Yadkinville, NC
336-679-2466
Sarah Tweed, BSW

Elkin, NC
336-526-2650
Lisa VanHorn, BS

Hillsville, VA
276-728-1030
Bruce Thomas, M. Ed

Stuart, VA
276-694-4416
Patricia Morris, BS, TRS

Mount Airy
2nd Tuesday of every month
9:00 a.m. Good Mourning with Fonda
Prime Sirloin

4th Tuesday of every month
11:30 a.m. Fonda's Lunch Bunch
Golden Corral

Elkin
1st and 3rd Tuesday of every month
10:00 a.m. "Living with Grief"
Matty's Restaurant

1st Monday of every month
7:00 p.m. "Transitioning to the New"
Fairfield Inn

4th Monday of every month
7:00 p.m. Prime Time with Lisa
(Loss of spouse in one's 30s, 40s, and 50s)
Fairfield Inn

Stuart
3rd Wednesday of every month
1:30 p.m. Support with Patricia
Stuart United Methodist Church

Wilkesboro
1st and 3rd Monday of every month
2:00 p.m. Listening with Lisa
Rose Glen Village

Yadkinville
1st Thursday of every month
11:30 a.m. Sharing with Sarah
Ace's Restaurant

Hillsville
3rd Thursday of every month
11:30 a.m. Moments with Bruce
Hillsville Office

Art Heals the Heart

Jessica Wyre, Special Contributor (Elkin, NC)

Art is generally thought of as something that brightens up a room or hangs in a museum. Sometimes it is mistaken as insignificant. However, art is an important aspect of life. One sees art everyday without even knowing it. Take a second and look around you. Everything you see was created by someone. Whether it's the chair you are sitting in, the clothes you are wearing, or the cup you sip your drink from, everything can be traced back to art.

Contrary to popular belief, art not only provides visual pleasure, but can benefit those

who practice it. Art serves as a way to express and heal oneself, by creating meanings that vary from person to person. Due to this, art can be used in many therapeutic ways, such as drawing, painting, or music. When each of these ways come together, they collectively form Art Therapy.

Art Therapy is an effective tool in mental health improvement, enhancement, and treatment. It has also been proven that Art Therapy, in the form of self-expression, can help people resolve conflicts and problems, develop

interpersonal skills, manage behavior, reduce stress, and increase self-esteem and self-awareness. This therapy can be practiced by individuals of all ages. You don't need to be "gifted" or a professional artist to enjoy the benefits of Art Therapy.

Sometimes people have trouble expressing themselves. However, there are many therapeutic exercises to find relief. For example, draw or paint your emotions. Whether you feel happy, angry, or lonely, you can express each of these

emotions by choosing different colors as you paint or even scribble. Another exercise involves making a collage: You can draw, take photos, or find things that remind you of your loved ones. Those are just two Art Therapy exercises—there are many others you can practice.

The next time you begin to feel negative, try Art Therapy. It may brighten up your day!

Mountain Valley Hospice & Palliative Care Bereavement Services

Following a patient's death, Mountain Valley provides specialized grief support services to help loved ones cope with their loss. These services are provided as part of hospice care for 13 months, at no cost to the recipient, and include:

- Grief counseling and education
- Face-to-face/phone sessions
- Monthly support groups
- Monthly newsletter

For questions and comments, contact Mountain Valley Hospice at 336-789-2922 or 888-789-2922, or mtnvalleyhospice.org.

Now available at the
Grief Resources section of the **Mount Airy Public Library**:



Books and videos may also be borrowed at any of the
Northwestern Regional libraries in Alleghany, Stokes, and Yadkin counties.

Return Service Requested

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Mount Airy/NC
Permit No. 59


Mountain Valley
Hospice & PALLIATIVE CARE
401 Technology Lane #200
Mount Airy, NC 27030