

*grief care*



*your journey to*  
**HOPE**

“Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” John 12:24



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*On behalf of the entire staff at First United Methodist Church, please accept our deepest sympathy for your loss. Our thoughts and prayers are with you. It is our hope that this booklet answers questions, giving you practical and spiritual guidance as you move forward in life without your loved one. Authors' Note: New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) used for Bible verses.*

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## Words That Hurt; Words That Help

Each of us can remember comments that have hurt and comments that have helped. It is hard to find the right words to say when someone is hurting, especially when a loved one has died. Sometimes, an attempt is made to help but the words spoken end up adding to your pain. While some words hurt, it is important to remember that God has given us words that help.

Jesus has a frank conversation with his disciples about death in John 14. He said, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places... And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:2-3) While it is good to know that God has provided a place for His children, we who have had someone we love die are left with the loss. But keep reading - in the 18th verse, Jesus declares, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you."

The word "orphaned" (also translated as *desolate* or *comfortless*) reminds us that God has no intention of leaving us empty or desolate when someone we love dies. That should not surprise us. In Jeremiah 29:11, God declares, "For surely I know the plans I have for you... plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."

*While some well-intentioned people may offer ideas about why your loved one died, even ideas that cause more pain and hurt, it is especially important to give attention to God's words about life and life beyond death.*

God's plans include a hopeful future, even when the present is painful. It is important to remember that God has given us a choice. While we are not able to stop the inevitability of death, we are able to choose how we will respond to it. Deuteronomy 30:15,19 holds a key in which God says to us, "I have set before you this day life and...death...Therefore, choose life."

*When someone you love dies, you have a choice.* Death is painful and grief is real, overwhelming at times, but the choice to live is still there. That choice is evident when you are asked, "Do you want to live until you die?" Death may have taken someone you love, but it cannot take you, your vitality and future unless you choose to allow that to happen.

Choose life, God tells us. Choosing life does not dishonor the one who has died. Choosing life does not neglect the importance of our loss or grief or minimize the difficult path before you.

Choosing life *does* remind you that grief is a journey, which leads through a dark valley to that hopeful future. And, most importantly, God is with you in that journey. "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever." (John 14:16) When someone you love dies you will occasionally hear words that hurt, but don't lose sight of the words that help.

*You are loved by God, who gives us a hopeful future, who will not leave us desolate and will be with us forever. Even better, God has overcome the power of death and offers to us the promise of eternal life.*

No matter what is said or what you may think, do not neglect His words that help. The Bible reminds us that God loves all people. In fact, God loves the world so much that He gave His only Son so that we would not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16) When the feelings of pain, hurt and loss are bearing down on you it is important to remember that there is a loving God who is with you, who cares for you. The Psalmist wrote, "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me;" (Psalm 23:4). The Apostle Paul reminds us "not anything in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39). No matter what is said when someone dies, God's words are hopeful words, healing words and words of comfort. You are inseparable, unconditionally loved and because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we can face death with hope.

In writing to the Corinthian church, Paul puts it this way: "Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality." (I Corinthians 15:51-53) When a loved one dies it hurts, but God speaks to that hurt with hopeful and comforting words. Let God's words take root in your heart and you will find a remarkable strength.

"Today I see that even death can be a form of healing."  
(Dr. Bernie Siegel, *Love, Medicine and Miracles*, p. 207)

### **LOCAL RESOURCES**

First United Methodist Church Pastoral Staff  
(863) 686-3163

Cornerstone Hospice Bereavement  
(888) 728-6234  
<https://web.cshospice.org/programs/grief-support/>

Chapters Health System (Good Shepherd Hospice)  
(800) 464-3994  
<http://bit.ly/2pfawYZ>

Peace River Center  
(863) 519-0575  
[www.peace-river.com/services.aspx](http://www.peace-river.com/services.aspx)

### **NATIONAL RESOURCES**

Compassionate Friends  
(877) 969-0010  
[www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

Grief Share  
(800) 395-5755  
<http://griefshare.org/>

Center for Loss and Life Transition  
(970) 226-6050  
<http://www.centerforloss.com>

## Common and Normal Responses to Grief

- A feeling of tightness in the throat or heaviness in the chest
- An empty feeling in the stomach and loss of appetite
- Restlessness and a need for activity, accompanied by an inability to concentrate
- A feeling that the loss isn't real, that it didn't actually happen
- A sense of the loved one's presence, like expecting your loved one to walk in the door at the usual time
- Aimless wandering, forgetfulness, inability to finish things you've started
- Difficulty sleeping, frequent dreams about your loved one
- A tendency to assume the mannerisms or traits of your loved one
- An intense preoccupation with the life of your loved one
- Intense anger at the loved one for leaving you or intense anger at God
- Guilt over not being kind enough to the person who died
- Taking care of others who seem uncomfortable, by politely not talking about the feelings of loss
- A need to tell and re-tell details regarding the loved one and the experience of their death
- Crying at unexpected times, physical weakness, intense feelings of being all alone
- Relief, particularly if the loved one suffered a lengthy or painful illness

According to college professor and applied philosopher Thomas Attig, bereavement "strikes a blow" to the meaning that we find in our personal, family and community life. Essentially, our daily life and routines are shattered. Realizing that life *cannot* be what it was, grievors slowly and painfully search to reshape and redirect day-to-day life. The grief process requires relearning each aspect of our world:

**The physical world:** Each bereaved person must come to terms with the objects left behind (clothes, books, homes, cars). Even shared everyday places can become a challenge (the usual booth at a restaurant, the grocery store, the routine teller at the bank or the familiar pew in church). Some people find comfort in returning to the "favorite places" and some find it too painful, thus seeking new patterns in their life. There is no right or wrong choice.

*If returning to church is too painful, you may try sitting in a different pew or trying a different worship service. Be sure to discuss your difficulties with one of the pastors and seek their counsel.*

**The social world:** Some people re-evaluate relationships and find the need to transform habits, motivations and ways of doing things with others.

**The emotional world:** Many bereaved people lose their self-confidence: "Who am I now?" or "What is to become of me without him or her?"

**The spiritual world:** Bereaved people ask hard questions as they seek answers and meanings. C.S. Lewis's journal (*A Grief Observed*) documents his spiritual anguish after the death of his wife. Widely considered a spiritual leader, Lewis struggled honestly with his faith as his relationship with God both deepened and modified after his deep personal loss.

In his book *The Heart of Grief* (p. xvi), Dr. Attig states, "Each of us experiences loss, even of the same person, uniquely. No two hearts ache the same way. We each face distinctive challenges in our corners of the world we inhabit.... We struggle to feel at home again in our physical surroundings, with fellow survivors and in the greater scheme of things - reshaping our lives, redirecting our life stories, reviving our souls and spirits."

## **The Tasks of Grief**

(J. William Worden, PhD; *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 4th ed.)

Human beings tend to make strong emotional bonds with others. Grief is the strong emotional reaction that occurs when those bonds are threatened or broken. The work of grief cannot be hurried. It takes a great deal of time, usually a year or more. It may be the purest pain you have ever known. The death of a loved one is considered the most stressful of all life change situations.

There is also truth that grief creates tasks that need to be accomplished. These tasks may seem overwhelming but can offer hope that something can be done and there is a way through the pain.



### *Task One: To Accept the Reality of the Loss*

Often, people experience shock after the death of a loved one. In this initial period, you may feel numb, displaying no feelings. You may have a hard time believing that your loved one has died. At some point, the reality of the loss sets in. This phase is marked by strong sadness and emotions that include feelings of panic, guilt, anger and loneliness. It is very important not to hold your feelings in. Unexpressed feelings often surface at a later time in unhealthy ways. Shared feelings help healing and can bring closeness to all involved.

Coming to accept the reality of the loss takes time. It involves knowing the person is gone - not only in your mind but in your heart.

### *Task Two: To Work Through the Pain of Grief*

During this phase, you may need to pull back from activities and people, feeling exhausted by the slightest effort. You may need lots of rest, allowing your mind, body and spirit to rest as a result of the upheaval in your life. During this time, you may find yourself feeling weak, out of control and hopeless. You may also find yourself thinking a lot about the person who has died, reliving memories over and over.

There is a tendency to avoid the painful feelings in a variety of unhealthy ways: numbing the pain with drugs or alcohol, idealizing the lost loved one, avoiding any reminders and staying very busy. Seek help from a counselor or trusted friend for positive and healthy ways to help your pain. Platitudes, given by others who try to be helpful, are sometimes hurtful - seek out people who can truly support you in this process.

### *Task Three: To Adjust to an Environment in Which the Deceased is Missing*

In any situation, it is seldom clear exactly what is lost. Many adjustments have to be made after losing a loved one. External adjustments - how the death affects one's everyday functioning in the world - may refer to facing an empty house, raising children alone or living on a reduced income. Internal adjustments - how the death affects one's sense of self - may refer to relearning how to live; asking "Who am I now that my loved one is gone?" Spiritual adjustments - how the death affects

one's beliefs, values and assumptions about the world - may cause the person left behind to feel that they have lost direction in life.

*Task Four: To Emotionally Relocate the Deceased and Move on With Life*

After a while and allowing yourself to grieve, you will come to a turning point. You will have a little more energy, more interest in activities and people around you. You may find yourself thinking somewhat differently about the person who has died, focusing more on good memories and a sense of gratitude for having had the person in your life. There will come a time when you will begin to readjust to life, reestablish old relationships and form new ones. You begin to get on with your life. The memories and love of your loved one are still there, but the wounds begin to heal. By experiencing deep emotion and accepting it, you will grow in warmth, depth, understanding and wisdom.

*Tasks can be revisited and reworked over time. Various tasks can be worked on at the same time. Remember, grieving is a fluid process.*

### **The Loss of a Life Partner**

"A broken heart is not a myth.... When we lose our mate, the person we have relied on for support, the one we have depended on in countless ways, is no longer there. The partnership is dissolved; half of us is gone." (Catherine M. Sanders, *Surviving Grief...and Learning to Live Again*, 1992, p. 139)

When someone has lost a life partner, the survivor not only loses all the emotional support, friendship and companionship, but also must find ways to fulfill all of the family's tasks and responsibilities. All elements of life are somehow shared: physical, intellectual, emotional, social, financial and religious. Therefore, there are many levels on which an adjustment must take place.

Grief is more than the physical separation. When someone loses a life partner/mate, they lose a part of their physical self, part of their social self and an enormous part of their emotional self. It takes several years to renew those parts and have them function normally again.

## Some Commonly Shared Feelings:

*"Sometimes I feel that I am doing contradictory things."*

In grief, you will be torn between the past and the future. Though you know that you must move ahead, you find yourself looking back. It is normal to experience contradictory feelings for some time.

*"At times I feel so isolated. What should I do about this feeling?"*

In general, if you have a healthy regard for yourself and strong feelings of independence, this feeling of isolation will disappear after a while. At the beginning, it may take an effort to socialize, but the rewards are well worth the effort.

*"I get angry now more than ever before, even with those I love. What should I do about this?"*

Anger is the most easily expressed human emotion, more easily expressed than doubt, fear, or guilt, for example. Therefore, anger is a normal reaction after the death of a spouse. Anger can be healthy when it is directed toward what you are really angry about; in this case, the death of your spouse. You may feel angry toward family members, friends, in-laws, physicians, clergy or even God. Try to focus your anger on what really makes you angry.

*"I did not do anything to cause the death of my partner and yet I feel guilty. There are so many things that I could have done, but did not do. Will this feeling of guilt go away?"*

Yes, there is a feeling of incompleteness following a death. You want more of the relationship that you enjoyed. There are often things you believe you could have done to make things turn out differently. In general, believe what is probably the case: you made the best decisions you could with the information at hand. These feelings of guilt and remorse will pass away in time.

*"I have problems making up my mind what to do. I seem to be indecisive. What should I do?"*

It is normal to have difficulties making decisions. You have been doing things jointly for so long. Now you must decide alone which choices to make. Try to make decisions on small matters first: food, clothing and so forth, and gradually go to larger matters. You may surprise yourself at what you are able to decide.

## The Loss of a Parent

"Whether we have lost one or both of our parents, we still feel like an orphan. The longer we have our parents with us, the more comfortable we feel, as if we will have them here forever, and the greater our shock when we are suddenly in the world without them." (Catherine M. Sanders, *Surviving Grief...and Learning to Live Again*, 1992, p. 156)

The parent-child bond represents the longest tie of our life. It is established in infancy and creates an attachment that endures well into old age. Our parents are a part of us.

The parent role does not disappear with the parent's death. As adult children, we can still feel the guidance we have grown used to. Most people tend to carry an ideal memory of parents as loving people who guided us through both the stormy times and good times of life.

For some, the memories are not ideal. Some may remember a controlling parent, an alcoholic parent, or a parent who expected perfection. If you have these memories, the love-hate aspect of the relationship must be addressed.

### The age of the survivor when the parent dies:

**Ages 20-35:** Adult children are usually moving away from their family of origin. Careers take a great deal of energy and concern; feelings of independence and self-reliance are being formed. The death of a parent at this stage usually means the loss of an important role model as well as a close friend.

**Ages 35-55:** Life at this point is taken up with career, family and personal concerns. The death of a parent during these years begins to foreshadow our own death.

**Ages 55 and beyond:** Up to the death, a role-reversal may have taken place. We watched a parent who used to be energetic and vital become weak and debilitated. Even though it is never easy to lose a parent, death during this time can be a blessed release from suffering.

## *What We Lose When a Parent Dies*

- *Special Love:* Few loves are as unconditional as that of a beloved parent. In a good relationship, a parent has supported and guided the adult child through the process of growing up.
- *A Dear Friend:* When a parent is lost, a longstanding friendship is lost forever. If there are things in the past that we feel we need to make right with a parent, a death cuts short that opportunity and we miss the chance.
- *Being Someone's Child:* When a parent dies, part of our childhood is lost. There is no one else who shared that part of our lives as our parents.
- *A Grandparent for our Children:* For many, a deep sense of security comes from seeing three generations connecting. The wonderful continuity of life makes everyone feel safe. Grandparents usually add a source of wisdom, kindness and patience.

### **The Loss of a Child**

"When our child dies, we mourn not only for the deprivation of the child's presence, but also for the lost aspects of ourselves."  
(Catherine M. Sanders, *Surviving Grief...and Learning to Live Again*, 1992, pp.122-123)

Although we all react differently, a loss of this size is devastating and crippling for both parents. Most often, your whole existence is in shock and it takes everything you have to simply survive. It is important to understand that at this time in your life when you most need your mate, he or she may be unable to provide the support you need. Not only are you unable to bear each other's pain, you are also unable to shield each other from that pain. If you have other children, it's also important to remember that they may not show their grief as easily as you do. They are still in pain and should be included in any support you seek. Begin to take positive steps:

- Seek support from others who have experienced the kind of pain you are suffering.
- Be kind enough to yourself - there will be times when you can use the compassionate ear of a third party.

- Don't sweep the stresses of everyday living under the rug. They'll only grow until they are harder to handle.
- Don't fear the anger of the other parent. The anger is honest, but it is important to understand that its real source is the death of your child, not your partner.
- Remember that each of you is in pain and that you would help each other if you could. Value the bond you share. You have lost enough already.

### *The Myth of Perfect Parenting*

There is often a great feeling of guilt following the death of a child and many parents criticize themselves endlessly. "I was unable to fill my role as parent," and, "I was unable to save my child and keep my child alive" are common feelings among grieving parents.

It is important to realize that being perfect is beyond your human capabilities. When trying to overcome unjustified guilt, the compassionate ear of a friend, family member or counselor can help you see more clearly that your child did not die because you sinned or were a bad parent.

### *The Other Children*

When a child dies, one of the most difficult roles for a mother or father is to continue being a parent to surviving children. Suddenly, you are thrust into a role that is almost beyond what can reasonably be expected of a human being. Parenthood becomes caring for your remaining children when it takes everything just to think or function for oneself. Often, surviving children feel abandoned or shoved aside. Just when they need their parents most, you may seem unreachable.

For this reason, it is vitally important to spend time alone with your children. Be kind to yourself; be kind to your children. Above all, remember that much more than the words you say. The love you share will be life-giving and healing, not only for your children, but for you as well.

## *Beginning to Function Again*

Remember, resuming everyday tasks can be difficult. There will be times you falter, seem to go backwards or become distracted. That's okay - learning to function again is a process. It doesn't happen overnight or all at once. The only correct timetable is the one that is acceptable and comfortable for you. Understand and accept that you have the rest of your life ahead of you. What you do with it is entirely a matter of choice. There are no rules or laws that require you to mourn forever.

Devote at least a small portion of every day to your remaining children - their problems, their joys. Do the same for your mate. Your attention span will probably be minimal at first, but gradually you will discover an increase in the amount of time you can spend giving active attention to your family. Few people can understand what you are feeling unless they have been there themselves. It is important, therefore, to seek out support people who have learned to survive through a loss of their own or professionals who have specific training and experience to help you deal with your loss.

### **Helping Children Cope with Death**

When children experience the death of a loved one, they grieve just as adults do. They may not be able to put their grief into words. They may hold their feelings inside or express them through their behavior. They may seem not to be affected but they are grieving, often very deeply.

As parents, we often want to protect children from the pain of grief. Because we have difficulty dealing with death, we wonder how a young child could possibly cope with it, so we exclude children. We leave them to answer their own questions as they struggle to cope with their loss. As a result, many children facing such an important loss feel bewildered and alone.

#### **Ways to Help**

- Be direct, simple and honest. Explain truthfully what happened in terms that children can understand.
- Encourage the child to express feelings openly. Crying is normal and helpful.

- Accept the emotions and reactions the child expresses. Don't tell the child how they should or should not feel.
- Offer warmth and your physical presence and affection.
- Share your feelings with the child. Allow the child to comfort you.
- Be patient. Know that children need to hear "the story" and to ask the same questions again and again.
- Reassure the child that death is not contagious; that the death of one person does not mean the child or other loved ones will soon die.
- Maintain as much order, stability and security in the child's life as you can.
- Listen to what the child is telling or asking you and then respond according to the child's needs.
- Allow the child to make some decisions about participation in family rituals, i.e., visitation, funerals and socializing after the funeral. Be sure to explain in advance what will happen.

### **Common Explanations That May Confuse Children**

Some explanations can actually make the grief process more difficult or cause problems later in life.

*Your mother went on a long journey:* "Then why is everyone crying?" "Why didn't she say good-bye?" "I thought vacation trips were supposed to be fun." "Daddy, please don't go away."

*Your Aunt was sick and had to go to the hospital:* "If I get sick will I go to the hospital and die, too?" "I don't want my sister to go to the hospital for an operation." "The doctor is bad - he made Aunt Sue die!"

*God was lonely and wanted your brother. He was so good that God wants him in heaven:* "I'm lonely for my brother. I need him more than God does. God is mean!" "If God wants the good people, I'm going to be as bad as I can. I don't want to die."

*Your grandfather went to sleep:* "I don't want to go to bed." "I'll make myself stay awake all night so I won't die, too."

### **Some Behaviors of Grieving Children**

School work or school life may be affected by death. Teachers and school counselors should be made aware of the situation.



Children may react to death in a variety of ways. Some will exhibit many of the following reactions, some only a few. Some will react immediately; some may have very delayed reactions. These reactions are very common, and should not be a concern unless continued for several months or increased.

*Denial: "My mommy didn't really die."*

When a child resumes play immediately or laughs it does not mean there are not feelings but that the loss is simply too difficult to bear at this moment.

*Anger and Hostility: "How could they die and leave me here all alone like this?" "Why didn't mommy and daddy take better care of my baby brother?" "Why did God let my friend die?"*

It is important to help children realize what they're really angry about: the death/loss.

*Guilt: "If I hadn't been such a bad little girl/boy my mommy wouldn't have died." "I was mad at my brother/sister, that's why he/she died."*

Children often believe that something they said or did may have caused the death. For example, children may believe that because they did not know CPR they are responsible for the death.

*Panic: "Who will take care of me now?"*

When a death has recently occurred, especially if it is the death of a parent, a common concern among children is whether they will be cared for. Although something upsetting has happened and the adults are perhaps confused and upset, children need to be reassured.

*Clinging or Replacement: "Don't leave me, Mommy!" "Uncle Dave, do you love me as much as Daddy did?"*

Give them your love and this should pass.

*Bodily Distress and Anxiety: "I can't sleep." "I feel sick just like my sister/brother did before he/she died."*

Keep your doctor informed about any problems. With time and caring, this should also pass.

*Idealization: "Grandpa was perfect."*

In their eyes and memory, maybe their grandfather did seem perfect. This is a common reaction for us all.

*Assumed Mannerisms: "Don't I sound just like my Daddy?"*

## **Additional Information**

GriefNet ([www.griefnet.org](http://www.griefnet.org)) is an Internet community of persons dealing with grief, death and major loss. The companion site ([www.kidsaid.com](http://www.kidsaid.com)) offers email support groups, online resources to share stories and artwork and resources for parents and educators.

*Living with Grief: At School* is a helpful booklet for school administrators and teachers. It is available from Hospice Foundation of America ([www.hospicefoundation.org](http://www.hospicefoundation.org)) and gives advice about handling a serious illness, death notification and grief in the school environment.

The National Alliance for Grieving Children ([www.nationalallianceforgrievingchildren.org](http://www.nationalallianceforgrievingchildren.org)) has a searchable state-by-state database of children's grief centers and programs.

***Monitor the grief responses of children. Behaviors that are illegal, dangerous or self-destructive need prompt and professional intervention.***

## **After a Suicide**

*"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?" Psalm 22:1*

Of dealing with the many aspects of death, dealing with the suicide death of a loved one can be the most difficult. As someone put it, "those who commit suicide miss out on the hope God wants us to have." Suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in the U.S. (more than 34,500 in 2007), according to the National Institute of Health. It is estimated that there are eleven attempted suicides per every death that occurs. There are few whose lives have not been touched by this tragic, seemingly senseless cause of death. And therein lie both the problem and the anguish - the hopeless, helpless nature of suicide.

For those who find themselves dealing with the aftermath of the loss of a family member or friend, the guilt, the blame, the anger,

the shock and the shame (though unwarranted) are almost overwhelming. There is the constant internal questioning of “what if,” “could I have done more” and the pervasive sense of unfinished business that will never be brought to completion. The grief process is deeply painful and is often made worse by the feelings of shame and isolation experienced by those left behind. Grief counseling with pastors and therapists, as well as having friends and family members who are willing to provide a safe and accepting space to listen to your pain, are vitally important.

It is also important to be reminded that nowhere does scripture consign someone to eternal judgment or damnation because they have committed suicide. Rather, there are words of hope and comfort to be found throughout the Bible. We are reminded in John 3:16-17 that God came to the world in Jesus in order to save us, not condemn us. As well, in John 14 we hear Jesus speaking to his disciples saying he will come and show us the way to Him, and that we are not to worry.

Paul’s wonderfully encouraging words in Romans 8 tell us that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God, “neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The great church reformer Martin Luther, in response to the suicide death of a young man said, “I don’t share the opinion that suicides are certainly to be damned. My reason is that they do not wish to kill themselves but are overcome by the power of the devil. They are like a man who is surrounded in the woods by a robber...” He understood the powerful effects that depression and mental illness can wreak upon an individual.

As you begin to work through your grief, some helpful reminders are:

- Depression, other mental disorders and substance abuse comprise 90% of all suicides.
- Deal with the facts: get the whats, whys and hows. Don’t be afraid to know what happened.

- “Lean into the grief.” You have to go through it to survive - even if you think you will fall apart. Share your feelings with those you feel safe with.
- Learn to recognize your feelings, particularly the feelings of anger or guilt. As you name it for yourself, confess it to God and be ready to receive the forgiveness that God offers.
- Trust God’s presence with you daily. Find ways to connect with God and others through Bible studies and worship. Open yourself to healing through community.

Most importantly, we are to be reminded that the love of God is always with us. The pain expressed Psalm 22 (*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*) is followed by the promise of Psalm 23: *“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want ... He leads me through the valley of the shadow of death and I will fear no evil.”*

## **The Work of Grief**

The loss of a loved one is the single most stressful thing that can happen to a person. Often, health problems appear during high stress times. By taking care of yourself, you can decrease the physical and emotional wear and tear that stress can cause. There are six components of stress management: Good Nutrition; Sleep; Relaxation; Physical Exercise; and Being Kind to Yourself.

### *Good Nutrition*

Changes in eating habits are normal during a period of grief. It is important to realize that your body is undergoing a lot of stress from the demands of grief. Even though you may not feel like eating, you need the energy provided by balanced, nutritious meals. It may be hard to cook for yourself. For your own healing, it is important to eat regular, balanced meals and get the vitamins you need.

### *Sleep*

People frequently have difficulty sleeping during a period of bereavement. It is important to get adequate rest. If you feel extra sleep is necessary, go to bed earlier. Experts say that taking a vacation from the alarm clock on weekends can upset the body’s sleep rhythms all week long. Make bedtime the final stage of a regular evening ritual. Walk the dog, watch TV, or read a book - the activity is less critical than sticking to the same

routine night after night. You'll sleep sounder after a late afternoon workout. Avoid any heavy-duty exertion before bedtime. Avoid the "big three"- caffeine, alcohol and tobacco. All of these upset sleep, even if you find them "relaxing." Alcohol may make you tired, but it reduces the quality of sleep. Caffeine and tobacco may interfere with sleep. Remember that tea, chocolate and many soft drinks all contain caffeine. A low protein, high carbohydrate snack before bedtime often shortens the time it takes to fall asleep. If you are on a special diet, be sure to consult your physician or nutritionist. For insomnia lasting longer than two weeks, consult a physician.

Many people find comfort in sleeping with a stuffed animal or an item of clothing that belonged to the loved one. Some people find soft music or the gentle whirring noise of a fan to be a comfort. Be creative in finding what works for you.

### *Relaxation*

Stress is the number one enemy of sleep. Relaxation training can help prevent a lot of disturbing thoughts and ease tight muscles that make it hard to sleep soundly. Some general guidelines you may find helpful: when we are tense, our breathing becomes shallow. When a person is weighted down with strong and painful feelings, he or she often breathes improperly, depriving the brain of necessary oxygen. Taking slow, deep breaths is a good way to ease your tension and resume proper breathing. Place your hand on your diaphragm (just below the rib cage and above the stomach). Take a deep breath through your nose. As you inhale, you should feel your hand pushed outward. Exhale through your mouth. Repeat this exercise until your breathing is deep and regular.

To relieve tension in your body, try this exercise. In a comfortable surrounding, try tensing and relaxing each muscle group in turn, starting with your feet and working up to your head. Be aware of tension in your body. Practice slow, deep breathing. The greatest stress reducer will be the love of those around you. Allow them the privilege of helping you through this. Spend time alone with God or in quiet contemplation.

### *Physical Exercise*

Moderate regular exercise helps relieve tension and elevate one's mood. Don't take on anything too strenuous and always

check with your physician before starting a new exercise program. Have a regular, planned activity, such as swimming or bike riding. This will help loosen tense muscles and increase your sense of well-being. Walking with a friend provides an opportunity to share feelings as well and can be excellent therapy. Many health clubs have excellent exercise programs for all ages and ability levels.

### *Be Kind to Yourself*

Emotional injury can often require even more healing than physical injury. It is normal for "low periods" to become "depressions" during a time of grieving. These are normal responses, as long as they do not continue for great lengths of time. Here are some additional suggestions for helping yourself through a "low period:"

- Get exercise and maintain good eating and sleeping habits.
- Go out to eat with friends.
- Read, watch TV or a movie or visit the park.
- Talk with a friend or your minister, write letters or have a massage.
- Set small goals that can be achieved every day; plan something for the future like planting flowers, painting or drawing, sewing or quilting.
- Do one good thing for yourself each day; do some needed chores; help out someone else; pay attention to your personal appearance. You will feel better when you look better.
- Engage in contemplative activities: listen to music, pray, get some sun, visit the countryside or just take a bath.

Crying is *normal and healthy* and should not in any way cause shame. Some people prefer to cry in private; some people prefer to cry with the comforting presence of others. Crying should not be discouraged, but it alone is not enough to overcome grief. Furthermore, you should not be forced to cry if you do not wish to do so.

A journal can help you work through your grief by giving you an outlet and a way to express yourself. You may find it helpful to put your thoughts about your loved one down on paper. Choose ideas that have significance for you, ideas specific to your

situation and relationship. Sometimes people will write to the person who died, expressing their thoughts and feelings: "What I wish I had said or hadn't said; ways in which you will continue to live on in me; what I learned about life from you."

Sometimes, suicide "appears to be" the only way out of an unhappy situation. Sometimes people believe that this is a way to return to the dead spouse. Occasional thoughts of suicide should not be a source of concern. As a new life-style is developed, these thoughts vanish.

*Get immediate professional help if you are concerned you might act upon thoughts of self-harm.*

### **Coping with Holidays, Special Family Occasions and Tasks of Daily Living**

*Holidays, anniversaries, birthdays, graduations.* These are usually happy times that people celebrate as they look forward to the future. If there has been a death in the family, emotional wounds are left that can ache during these times of warmth and cheer. Feelings of isolation and loneliness can magnify because this is a new holiday, unlike the holidays of the past. You may choose to celebrate the holiday in a new way by starting new traditions or joining others in a new setting. With planning and forethought, it is possible to get through these times. Dr. Camille Wortman has the following suggestions:

1. **Plan ahead:** initiate activity yourself; do not wait for others. Plan your own holiday; make phone calls to friends or relatives. Calls to people in similar situations can be helpful. Follow through with these activities.
2. **Have a family meeting:** discuss how to spend the holiday. Let everyone have a say, even the children.
3. **Consider changing your routine:** you may want to spend time with relatives or friends, or even leave town for the beach or mountains.
4. **Take charge of your social life:** choose to be with people who make you feel comfortable and safe. Avoid social events that feel like an obligation.
5. **Scale back:** grief robs our emotional and physical energy, so consider cutting back on holiday tasks.

6. **Be gentle with yourself:** realize you will feel sad at times and do not expect too much of yourself.
7. **Honor your loved one's memory:** acknowledge the absence of your loved one. Have a dinner or toast in their honor. Visit the cemetery or memorial site, if that brings you comfort. Do what feels right to you.
8. **Find people who will provide support:** seek out good listeners or find someone to help with tasks that are very painful (like shopping for surviving family members).

## Practical Advice for the Tasks of Daily Living

When is the right time to clean out a closet? Only when you are ready! Professional grief coach Patricia Johnston speaks of cleaning out the closet of a deceased loved one is a "heart-wrenching task." Many clothes have sentimental attachments and often retain the characteristic scent of the loved one. Her advice:

1. There is not timetable for moving/packing/giving away a loved one's belongings.
2. The time you choose to move the belongings is symbolic-meaning that you are on the way to accepting the unacceptable and creating a "new normal" for yourself.
3. You may choose to have an understanding friend or family member help you with the packing. Use the time to share memories, thoughts and stories.

Practical advice can be found from *Open to Hope*

- "Cleaning out the closet" also includes the home office, garage, work office and piles of papers. This can be overwhelming, so take one drawer, corner or cabinet at a time. Take time to savor each object as it passes through your hands.
- Be careful not to give items away too quickly, especially something that may serve to become a family heirloom later (such as a watch, a tie or a favorite jacket).
- Some people choose to give items to a special friend, such as a coffee mug to an office buddy.
- Some people choose to give clothes to a homeless shelter, thus blessing others.
- Some people choose to keep a box of special possessions (a wallet, driver's license, a special cap, shirt or letters).



As painful as this process is, “cleaning out the closet” is a way to process the grief. Be gentle with yourself and do not become overwhelmed. If you do not feel ready to tackle this task, then wait until you are. Do not allow anyone to rush you in this important and highly personal task of grieving.

### **Suggested Reading for Adults**

*Beyond the Broken Heart: Daily Devotions for Your Grief Journey* (2012); by Julie Yarbrough

This book provides comforting devotions for the first year of the grief journey. Each month begins with a short personal reflection related to the month’s theme, followed by a preparation scripture and meditation that set the stage for the next four weeks. Each brief daily meditation includes scripture, a thought to consider, a prayer and words of assurance.

*I Can’t Stop Crying: It’s So Hard When Someone You Love Dies* (2012); by John D. Martin and Frank Ferris

This down-to-earth book was written for individuals who are recently bereaved of someone very close to them, typically a partner, though messages have very wide application. A narrator guides the flow, as over fifty people tell their grief stories.

*You Can Help Someone Who’s Grieving* (1996); by Victoria Frigo, Diane Fisher, and Mary Lou Cook

This book gives common sense advice on how to help a bereaved friend.

*Letters To My Husband* (1995); by Fern Field Brooks

A book about widowhood, showing one woman’s first year of mourning following the sudden death of her husband due to a heart attack. She relives the trauma of his death as well as many warm memories of their life together.

*Tracks of a Fellow Struggler: Living and Growing through Grief* (1995); by John R. Claypool

John Claypool was an Episcopal priest, as well as a popular teacher and retreat leader. This small book is a series of four sermons, delivered to his congregation during his young daughter’s battle with cancer, and after her death.

*The Mourning Handbook* (1994); by Helen Fitzgerald

Written as a companion to mourners, this book provides practical and emotional assistance during the trying times before and after the death of a loved one.

*Death Be Not Proud: A Memoir* (2007); by John Gunther

Gunther (1901-1970) was one of the best known and most admired journalists of his day. This book is a moving record of the last months of the life of his son, Johnny, who died as the result of a brain tumor at the age of seventeen.

*A Grief Observed* (1961); by C.S. Lewis

Written after his wife's tragic death as a way of surviving the "mad midnight moment," this classic Christian text is C.S. Lewis' honest reflection on the fundamental issues of life, death and faith in the midst of loss.

*After Goodbye: How to Begin Again After the Death of Someone You Love* (1994); by Ted Menton

This book explains how to begin life again after the death of a loved one. By taking into account the most common elements of the grieving process, this sensitive guide to moving on teaches the bereaved how to work their way through the pain and back to life.

*Surviving Grief...and Learning to Live Again* (1992); by Catherine M. Sanders

Drawing directly from her own experiences as a therapist, Dr. Sanders delves deeply and compassionately into the different experiences of grief and talks about what it means to lose a mate, a parent or a child.

*Good Grief* (2010); by Granger E. Westberg

Now in a 50th anniversary edition, this classic text encourages and educates grievers in a new way. The author helps readers understand the ten identifiable stages of grief, in this faith-based book of understanding and healing.

*Understanding Your Grief Touchstones of Hope and Healing* (2003); by Alan D. Wolfelt

Explaining the important difference between grief and mourning, this book explores every mourner's need to acknowledge death and embrace the pain of loss. Also explored are the many factors that make each person's grief

unique and the many normal thoughts and feelings mourners might have.

*A Widow's Story* (2011); by Joyce Carol Oates

National Book Award winner Joyce Carol Oates unveils a poignant, intimate memoir about the unexpected death of her husband of 46 years.

*Fireflies* (1999); by David Morrell

Author of suspense mysteries, David Morrell shares the story of his 15-year-old son who waged a heroic but doomed struggle with cancer. This is one father's powerful and unforgettable story of fierce love and impenetrable loss.

*Lament for a Son* (1987); by Nicholas Wolterstorff

The author's son Eric died in a mountain-climbing accident and this book gives voice to Wolterstorff's grief. Though it is intensely personal, he decided to publish it in the hope of helping others.

*Let Me Grieve, But Not Forever* (2004); by Verdell Davis

Written from a Christian perspective, this deeply moving book is from journals that the author kept after the sudden and violent death of her husband. With remarkable honesty and courage, she shares how to examine grief and ultimately find healing in the process.

*Seven Choices: Finding Daylight after Loss Shatters Your World* (2003); by Elizabeth H. Neeld

The author, a writer and former English professor, tells the story of her own widowhood. She offers a well-organized and detailed review of research on grief with 60 vignettes by others who have lost loved ones through death or divorce.

*I Will Not Leave You Desolate* (1994); by Martha Whitmore Hickman

Published by *The Upper Room*, this book provides faith-based help for parents in dealing with the pain and trauma associated with the death of a child. Simple and appropriate, the book contains short sections that are easy to read and easy to understand.

*The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005); by Joan Didion

Didion's husband, the writer John Gregory Dunne, died of a heart attack, just after they had returned from the hospital where their only child, Quintana, was lying in a coma. This book is a memoir of Dunne's death, Quintana's illness and Didion's efforts to make sense of a time when nothing made sense.

### **Suggested Reading About Grief in Children**

*Children Mourning. Mourning Children* (1995) by Ken Doka

Published by the Hospice Foundation of America, this book addresses the ways that children grieve - ways that are both similar to and different from adults. This book aims to demonstrate that open communication between parents and children will lead to skills and understanding that are essential to the grieving child.

*How Do We Tell The Children?* By Dan Schaefer and Christine Lyons.

This book gives parents and other adult caregivers a step-by-step guide for helping children age two to teen cope with loss when someone dies. It covers communication skills that will allow the child to express their feelings about death and work through bereavement in age-appropriate ways.

*A Child Dies: A Portrait of Family Grief* (1994); by Joan H. Arnold & Penelope B. Gemma

Written by two nurses, this book attempts to help parents and health professionals understand the grieving process that follows the death of a child.

*Recovering from the Loss of a Child* (1982); by Katherine F. Donnelly

This book shows bereaved parents, siblings and others how to cope with one of life's cruelest blows. With inspiring first-hand accounts from others who have survived this heartbreaking experience, this compassionate book can help in healing the heart and learning to live again.

*Guiding Your Child Through Grief* (2000); by James P. Emswiler & Mary Ann Emswiler

Written by the founders of the New England Center for Loss & Transition, this book takes away the uncertainty and helpless feelings people commonly feel toward children who mourn. The compassionate guide offers expert advice during difficult days to help a child grieve the death of a parent or sibling.

*Talking About Death: A Dialogue Between Parents and Children* (2011); by Earl Grollman

Recently updated, this classic guide for parents helps their children through the death of a loved one. This book is a compassionate guide for adults and children to read together, featuring a read-along story and answers to questions children ask about death. With a helpful list of dos and don'ts and a guide to explaining death, Grollman provides sensitive and timely advice for families coping with loss.

*Talking With Children About Loss* (1999); by Maria Trozzi

Through captivating stories and thoughtful analysis, Trozzi explains how to handle the difficult job of talking with children and adolescents about loss. Topics include: helping children face funerals, wakes, and memorial services and age-appropriate responses to children's questions and concerns.

### **Suggested Reading for Children**

*The Dragonfly Door* (2007); by John Adams and Barbara L. Gibson

Written for children ages five and older, this book helps children identify the beauty and hope in all cycles of life as they follow two insects, Lea and Nym, and the struggles Nym endures when her friend disappears. This is a tender story about loss and change, written to help parents express their views about life and death.

*The Fall of Freddie the Leaf* (1982); by Leo Buscaglia

This beloved classic is a warm, wonderfully wise and strikingly simple story about a leaf named Freddie. How Freddie and his companion leaves change with the passing seasons, finally falling to the ground with winter's snow, is an inspiring allegory illustrating the delicate balance between life and death.

*Always and Forever* (2003); by Alan Durant & Debi Gliori  
Written for preschool to third grade children, this book tells the story of Otter, Mole, Fox and Hare, who share a house in the woods. When Fox dies, the others struggle with their grief. By remembering the love, wisdom and support he showed them and the funny things he used to do, they are able to create a memorial for him. They realize that Fox is with them "always and forever" in their memories and in their laughter.

*Badger's Parting Gifts* (1994); by Susan Varley  
For children age three and older, the author's warm and sensitive illustrations reflect the hopeful mood of this tale about woodland animals learning to accept their friend Badger's death. Badger's friends are overwhelmed with their loss when he dies. By sharing their memories of his gifts, they find the strength to face the future with hope.

*All resources are not equally helpful, as everyone grieves in a unique way. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact one of our pastors at (863) 686-3163. Likewise, if you come across helpful material, please share.*





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