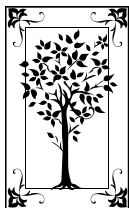


Maximum Living Newsletter

“Dedicated To Our Families As They Take The Grief Journey”

FEBRUARY, MARCH, APRIL, 2008



Grief. Our own thoughts and feelings are a personal journey. Mourning, however, is when we bring those thoughts and feelings outside of us. Mourning is a social event. It is also a family affair. This issue is dedicated to all families, large and small, who seek tools to share with each other, and with generations to come, memories of the lives of their loved ones who have died.

Death of a Spouse: Facing Life Challenges



by John D. Canine, Ed.D., Ph.D.

It is ironic that while our society appears to recognize the loss of a spouse (mate, partner) more than many other types of deaths, there as yet exists no widespread, established, accepted, consistent, supportive institution or process designed to assist and help integrate grieving widows and widowers into their changed social status.

Similar Grief Issues for Women and Men

Demographics show that women will spend more years as widowed people than will men, but initially there are some notable similarities in the grief issues and tasks faced by males and females following the death of a spouse. In spousal relationships, each person fulfills a variety of roles and functions, while sharing others. Spouses may co-manage a home, deciding together how to allocate money, whose career or job may require priority, and when and where to spend leisure time and entertain themselves.

Other couples may divide responsibilities more specifically, according to ability, inclination, or social stereotypes. Jobs such as yard work, financial record keeping, cooking, religious instruction of children, household repair and even pet care can be seen as the “domain” of one spouse rather than the other.

Going it Alone

After the death of a spouse, all these roles and functions must be assumed by the surviving partner. This can create overwhelming feelings of loneliness, inadequacy, anger, helplessness and vulnerability, depending on the nature of the relationship that had been established with the deceased partner. These feelings can be further exacerbated if the surviving spouse must assume the sole responsibility of raising minor children.

This dramatic shift in life circumstances (whether abrupt or anticipated) is intensified by changes in how the surviving spouse is regarded by family, friends and the community. When spouses have primarily shared social relationships with other couples, the surviving spouse may feel awkward (a

“fifth wheel”) or may discover that he or she no longer fits with the pair oriented social order. Issues of sexual vulnerability, competition, and exploitation may arise. If friendships had been defined by the deceased spouse’s employment, there is a real potential that such social “belonging” may cease altogether.

Broad Spectrum of Feelings

The community may question how and when to include a surviving spouse in activities that had previously been shared by both partners, and these uncertainties may be compounded by a wide range of emotions and behaviors evidenced by the widowed themselves as they proceed throughout the grief process. Lund, Catera, and Diamond (1986) found that the newly widowed exhibit a broad spectrum of feelings and responses to their new role, alternately demonstrating depression, guilt or anger at being alone. This same person may feel pride, strength, or accomplishment in successfully handling the new challenges of performing and coping that widowhood presents.

The process of grieving a spousal loss is a long one, and intervention by funeral professionals at an appropriate time can serve to mitigate the heightened sense of isolation and loss of purpose that widowed people often experience. Referrals to support groups organized specifically for the widowed can be of tremendous value to the grieving person.

Dr. John D. Canine is an Author, Educator, Grief Psychotherapist & President of Maximum Living Consultants in Clarkston, Michigan



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Grieving As a Family: Travels Through Loss and Change

by Emily B. Trahan, LLPC

A family experiences many ups and downs over time. Most families are resilient and find a way to get through the stressful times. Death of a loved one shocks the family system. Everyone is affected. People cry. Children ask questions. Roles change, especially as family members need to take over things done by the person who died. Structure crumbles. Relationships are strained. How does the family find a way to get through this time? Where are the resources, inside and outside the family?

A family has to find a way get through its loss together, while respecting that each person is unique. For example, women and men may have different grieving styles. Women often like to talk or get together with a close friend to share their feelings and cry. Men may prefer to physically express any pent-up emotions by planting a memorial garden, starting a building project, or cleaning out the garage. To many, their industrious activity may look like they are not grieving. It is important to consider that each family member may cope a little differently with losing someone they love. There is no right, or wrong way to travel through loss and experience the change that inevitably occurs.

According to Walsh & McGoldrick (2004), a family faces several tasks adapting to the death.

Shared acknowledgement of the reality of death.

While people may react differently to death, each person must acknowledge what happened. It's okay to talk about how the person died. Children may ask questions, and giving

them age-appropriate information may help them feel more secure and included. Taking them to the funeral or visiting time can help them realize what happened. Some facts about the death may be reserved for a time when a young child is old enough to take them in. Not talking, or listening to what concerns the child, can make them skeptical. "What other secrets are you keeping from me?"

Shared experience of the loss.

Rituals can be a way for each family member to grieve in his or her own way, while still sharing in the loss experience. For example, funerals are active ways to connect families in the healing process. Grandma may cry, Dad may want to carry the casket, and one of the children may want to read a poem. Many families find selecting photos for a visitation DVD gives them a chance to share thoughts and feelings about the person who died. Everyone does their part and experiences the loss together.

Reorganization of the family system.

Following a loss, families face many changes and transitions. Relationships can be different now that someone is gone. Family structure might change. Perhaps you are now the oldest in the family – what does that mean for the future? Roles, or what you are used to doing, can be different, too. Women may have to take care of the yard and the car, and men may have to do laundry and cooking. Someone who might be leaving the established family system - going off to college, getting married, moving for a new job, retirement - may hesitate to do so right now. One event – a loss – can have many effects on how the family adjusts to change.

Reinvestment in other relationships and life pursuits.

The death of a loved one can create a sense of imbalance, or lopsidedness, a "hole" in the family structure. However, as the family adjusts to the changes that come from this loss, eventually the family can become balanced and strong again. For example, holidays or anniversaries can become more joyful as you remember and honor the person who died and create new traditions. Sharing memories, though it brings tears, can also bring laughter.

In any family, there may be some rough times, even anger or fighting, but it is all part of experiencing the loss of some you love. A family can be a source of strength. It is okay to cry in front of your grandchildren, or to set an extra place at the dinner table on special days, or to stop by the cemetery together and say hi.

Ms. Trahan is aftercare coordinator and ML support group facilitator at W.A. Trahan Funeral Chapel, in Bay City, MI and Lewis E. Wint & Son Funeral Home, in Clarkston, MI.



Maximum Living Consultants, Inc.
Bereavement Aftercare Services

936 S. Baldwin Rd., Suite 102 • Clarkston, MI 48348 • 248-814-0706
www.maximumlivingconsult.com • E-Mail: info@maximumlivingconsult.com

John D. Canine, Ed.D., Ph.D.
President

Nanci K. Canine
Vice-President

Shirley A. Brogan, LPC
Coordinator, Counselor
Support Services

Emily B. Trahan, LLPC
Counselor Support Services

Yasmine Carron
Administrative Assistant

Nicole Lennox
Administrative Assistant

SUPPORT GROUP FACILITATORS

Marsha Levine Arias, LCSW
P. J. Bartos, LMSW
Jan Borgman, LISW, CGC
Janet Breen, LAC
Shirley Brogan, LPC
Maria DeWitt, MA, LLPC
Betty Hickman
Rebecca Hicks, LCSW
Tanya Horan
Joyce Jones, LCSW
Crystal D. Kimmer, LSW

Sarah Landrum, LCSW
Doree Lipson, LMSW
Vivian Lozada, LMHC
Walt McKay, LPC
Mary Sue McNutt, LCSW
Kim Moseley, LCSW
Pat Mroch, LPC
John Naile, M.Div.
Kathleen A. Niederhood
Sue Nickerson, LPC
Jennifer Parmenter, LMSW

Lori Poyer, LMSW
Karen Schultz, LCSW
Trieneke M. Self
Patricia Simmons, LSW
Steve Smith
Marjorie Thomas, MSW
Vickey Thompson, LPC
Emily B. Trahan, LLPC
Ellen Tucker, MSW, CSW
Mary Jane Ward, LPC
Elizabeth Wood, LCSW

CARE PARTNERS

Arkansas Dept. of Health Hospice
Russellville, AR
Hospice Care Network
Westbury, NY

Hospice of Salina
Salina, KS
Tomorrow's Child
Lansing, MI

Grief Resource Center

For Additional Resources, please visit: www.maximumlivingconsult.com

ORGANIZATIONS FOR SUPPORT

Compassionate Friends for Bereaved Parents
P.O. Box 3696 • Oak Brook, IL 60522 • 630-990-0010
<http://www.compassionatefriends.org>

Widowed Persons
1909 K Street, NW • Washington, DC 20049
WidowNet: <http://www.fortnet.org/WidowNet>

WEBSITES WORTH SURFIN'

Beyond Indigo-<http://www.beyondindigo.com>
Bereavement Magazine-<http://bereavementmag.com>
GriefNet-<http://rivendell.org>
Centering Corporation - www.centering.org
Willowgreen-(James E. Miller)-<http://willowgreen.com>
Journey of Hearts - www.journeyofhearts.org
For Teens Experiencing Loss - www.fireinmyheart.com
WidowNet - www.widownet.org

SUGGESTED READINGS

The Challenge of Living, by John D. Canine, Ed.D., Ph.D. (call 866-540-0047 to order) Ball Publishers, 1983.

Being a Widow, by Lynn Caine. Penguin Books, 1990.

Finding Your Way After Your Spouse Dies, by M. Felber. Ave Maria Press, 2000.

Helping Children Cope with the Loss of a Loved One: A Guide for Grown-Ups, by W. C. Kroen. Free Spirit Publishing, 1966. (www.freespirit.com to order)

Living with Grief: Children, Adolescents and Loss, by J. Gordon and K. Doka. Hospice Foundation of America, 2000.

The Bereaved Parent, by H. Schiff. New York: Crown, 1977.

Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss, by Hope Edelman. Dell Publishing, 1994.

Sibling Grief: Healing After the Death of a Sister or Brother, by P. G. White. iUniverse, 2006

The Loss that is Forever: The Lifelong Impact of the Early Death of a Mother or Father, by M. Harris. New York: Penguin, 1995.



Sibling Survivor Guilt

by Bob Baugher, PH.D.

What can your family do together on your shared grief journey?

- Talk about what happened
- Light a candle
- Release a balloon
- Tell the stories
- Share a memory
- Write a letter to the person who has died
- Draw pictures, make scrapbooks
- Share your thoughts and feelings
- Allow for different grieving styles
- Go to grief support groups
- Seek family counseling if necessary

The following are excerpts from an article in *We Need Not Walk Alone*, published by *The Compassionate Friends*.

Some common types of survivor guilt:

- **Being alive.** Knowing that your brother or sister will never experience life again while you continue to live day after day.
- **Surpassing the age he/she was.** Some siblings figure it out to the exact day. Every day you live beyond that date may somehow feel strange, unfair, or even a relief.
- **Using his things.** For some, using items that belonged to a brother or sister brings comfort and produces feelings of closeness. Other siblings report that using items such as a car, CD player, sports equipment, or a toy brings feelings of unworthiness. "Here I am enjoying his CD player and it's all because he died- that feels weird."

- **Doing things she did.** Feeling guilty for taking her place.
- **Doing things she never got to do.** Graduating, playing on a sports team, getting a driver's license, getting married, having a child.
- **Recognizing that you have become better at something than he was.** Playing a musical instrument, excelling at snowboarding, spelling, or any other talent.
- **Doing something different than the way she used to do it.** Setting the table, cleaning (or not cleaning your room), arguing with your parents. Guilt may hit when someone says "That's not the way ___ used to do it."
- **Feeling like it should have been you.** This can happen when you are feeling down on yourself. You may need to talk this out with a counselor or someone who can listen to you.

Maximum Living Support Groups

The purpose of the Support Group is to come together and encourage each other during this time of loss. The meetings are part of the community outreach program of our Funeral Home and are available at no charge. Please join us. Friends and family members are always welcome.

The following Support Group is available in your area, for a complete listing, please go to: www.maximumlivingconsult.com
