

# Maximum Living Newsletter

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

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## FINDING COMPANIONS AS WE DO OUR GRIEF WORK

by John D. Canine, Ph.D.

There is relative agreement in Western societies that a set of basic tasks must be completed for successful mourning to take place. The basic tasks are part of an overall process that can be called “grief work.” Grief work involves reliving, thinking through, and breaking down each “item” of our relationship with a deceased loved one, and feeling whatever pain this process may produce.

Gradually, with each item, the griever raises the question “How can I do that with somebody else?” Maybe it will not be possible. Maybe it will evolve into something new in the life of the survivor.

Psychologist Dr. William Worden, a recognized authority on grief and bereavement, describes key requirements necessary for healthy grief work, as well as potential difficulties and pitfalls. The following is a review of Worden’s four primary requirements for successful completion of grief work. I also add ways in which Grief Support Groups may help individuals complete these tasks. Interspersed are comments made by actual support group members as to how the groups assisted them.

### Accept the Reality of the Loss

The first hurdle or “job” the survivor faces is acknowledging and accepting the truth of the loss. My loved one has died. Many people attempt to deny this reality. They may call out to the deceased, search for the deceased in familiar locations, or refuse to accept the circumstances that led to the death.

One of the ways to facilitate acceptance of the reality is by seeing or being with the dead body. Grief counselors and funeral service providers encourage mourners to observe, touch and even photograph the body if they wish. Each activity helps the bereaved accept the truth of the death, and arrive at the knowledge that reunion is impossible.

Coming to a bereavement support group also helps acknowledge the reality of the loss. At group, the griever is encouraged to say out loud that their loved one has died, and to tell the story of the death if he or she wishes. Group members, listen, and do not stop the telling of the story, or change the subject to avoid the discomfort of grief. If the

group is held at the funeral home, returning to that place may be difficult, but coming there to attend a grief support group may also facilitate making the loss real.

*“I feel so much at home here, that I know it is a safe place to talk and let out all of my feelings.” - Emily, following the death of her mother.*

### Experience the Pain of Grief

Allowing the full expression of pain resulting from the death of a loved one is central to an ultimately successful resolution of grief. It is also very difficult. Some people attempt to avoid it by using strategies that do nothing more than delay or suppress needed relief.

One avoidance strategy is buying into the subtle, but prevalent discomfort society has with outward displays of mourning. For example, one maintains an outward “face” minimizing grief, while crying in private moments. The dichotomy of “stiff upper lip” versus the authentic anguish a griever might feel can detach the bereaved not only from their pain, but from valid sources of support as well.

Other strategies may include:

- Removing oneself through travel or moving from the old environment of which the deceased was a part. This is sometimes called “the geographic cure.”
- Engaging in overwork, oversocializing or overinvestment in the lives of others.
- Becoming romantically involved (where spousal loss is concerned) in another relationship prematurely.

It is fair to say that pain cannot be suppressed indefinitely, and that it will manifest itself sooner or later in one form or another: depression, physical reactions, substance abuse, or experiencing the avoided pain in response to (and on top of!) a subsequent loss.

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*“I need to be with those who are also walking this path.”*

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## Companions *(Continued from page 1)*

A bereavement support group is a place where a range of emotions is seen and accepted. Tissues may be offered as tears come freely. Group members who are farther along on their grief journey can recall, identify with and validate the intense feelings of newcomers.

*"I come to support group to bring the sadness out. We all have so much in common and a bond is formed. This is one of the best things you can do to get the sadness out and in the open. It is okay to cry and share."* – Sylvia, after death of her husband.



*"Come to group and don't be afraid to share your feelings, or just listen."*– Elaine, after the death of her husband.



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#### CARE PARTNERS

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

HospiceCare of Southeast Florida  
Fort Lauderdale, FL  
Tomorrow's Child  
Lansing, MI  
Hospice of Salina  
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### Adjust to an Environment in Which the Deceased is Missing

This requirement for completion of successful mourning can represent a wide range of "work." In spousal situations, or when the bereaved lived in the same house, there may be many challenges. Every room, its contents, and even the neighborhood many trigger reminders and painful cues that the loved one, along with his or her activities and roles, is no longer there. The sense of emptiness, of missing the person, and the initial sense of helplessness may require a lengthy period of adjustment. In cases of close friendship, or even colleagues at work, it may be extremely difficult for the griever to be without the deceased's presence, availability, support, or personality that were relied upon and enjoyed.

Supportive family, friends and professionals need to watch for grievors who become rooted in helplessness, refusing to learn new skills or accept new responsibilities, preferring instead to lean on others rather than make an effort to devise new ways of functioning in their altered environment.

During a bereavement support group, members can talk about the changes occurring in their lives since a loved one has died. Since adjustments are made over time, members often make the commitment to attend a support group regularly for some time, even a year or more, in order to have a place to talk about whatever comes up as they create a new life. Members get to know each other and what each person is facing. They can be cheerleaders for each other, and give ideas on how to cope with new life events, or with anniversaries of former special times now spent without their loved one.

*"This journey is so hard and lonely – I need to be with those who are also walking this path."* – Sam, after the death of his wife.

*"I look for outside help with those who have experienced the same loss."*– Chuck, after the death of his wife.

### To Emotionally Relocate the Deceased and Move on With Life

A griever never altogether forgets a deceased loved one who was so highly valued in life. Worden says the task then becomes not to give up the relationship with the deceased, but to find an appropriate place for him or her in the griever's emotional life, a place that will enable the griever to go on living effectively in the world. Forming new relationships requires both time and the appreciation that life is meant to be lived in the present – not in the past, and not saved for "someday."

The griever has a new identity. A wife becomes a widow. A wife of 50 years may initially struggle with a sense of guilt or betrayal when she finds herself involved, laughing, or having a wonderful time. She must realize that her enjoyment in being alive does not mean that

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## Grief Resource Center

For Additional Resources, please visit the [GRIEF RESOURCE CENTER](http://www.maximumlivingconsult.com) at: [www.maximumlivingconsult.com](http://www.maximumlivingconsult.com)

### SUGGESTED READINGS

- Being a Widow.** By Lynn Caine. Penguin Books, 1990.
- 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](http://www.freespirit.com) to order)
- What's Heaven?** by Maria Shriver. St. Martin's Press, 1999.
- The Challenge of Living,** by John D. Canine, Ed.D., Ph.D. (call 866-540-0047 to order) Ball Publishers, 1983.
- Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss,** by Hope Edelman. Dell Publishing, 1994.
- A Grief Observed,** by C.S. Lewis. Bantam Books, 1961.
- The Mourning Handbook,** by H. Fitzgerald. Fireside, 1994.

### COUNSELOR RESOURCE

North Shore Wellness Services, Ltd., Northbrook, IL  
 Noah C. Weinstein, MA, LPC (312) 513-1629.  
[www.northshorewellness.com](http://www.northshorewellness.com)

### Companions *(Continued from page 2)*

she has forgotten or is being disloyal to her beloved spouse. The history and love they shared were real – but he is no longer available to her.

For parents, the death of a child violates society's expected order of events and robs parents of their personal link to the future, to continuity of family legacies, to their touch of immortality. How does a bereaved parent ever again answer the question: "How many children do you have?" Parents lives, and the life of the remaining family continue on in the present, even as the deceased child's life ends abruptly.

At a bereavement support group, members acknowledge and explore their new identities. They can learn coping skills from others who are doing the same thing. They can also share memories of the deceased and talk about how to deal with upcoming anniversary dates and remembered times. The group will not expect them to "get over it," as quickly as others might, but it can also support "moving on."

*"One woman in my support group told me she and one of the men attending the group were "seeing each other." They were celebrating his birthday tonight: he is 59. She asked him if he wanted all 59 candles on his cake. He replied, "just make it 18, because that's how old I feel." - Mary Sue, ML group facilitator*

### 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'

- Centering Corporation** - [www.centering.org](http://www.centering.org)  
**Willowgreen**-(James E. Miller)-<http://willowgreen.com>  
**Bereavement Magazine**-<http://bereavementmag.com>

## Moving On: The Pile Plan

A painful task for griever is deciding what to do with the clothes and personal belongings of the deceased. One good approach is the ABC Plan, also known as the Pile Plan.

Take a group of items, maybe everything from one closet or one room, and put them in the living room, or another large space. Go through them one at a time. If you want to talk about a memory brought up by one item, tell the story to the person helping you, or call someone. Write the story down; take a picture of the item to go with the story, and put both in a memory book.

Then organize the piles as follows:

- ◆ Pile A - things you want to keep.
- ◆ Pile B - things you are sure you want to get rid of. Things to dispose of, sell, or give away.
- ◆ Pile C - things you are not sure about.



Put Pile A back in a closet or storage place. Eliminate Pile B. Load Pile C into bags, boxes, or other containers. Label and date each one, to be stored out of the way. One month later, bring Pile C out again, and work the Pile Plan over again. It is best not to work alone! Friends can help move the "stuff," as well as listen to and help cherish the memories. If necessary, do the Pile Plan over again in three months. This Plan also helps with all of the tasks mentioned in the previous article!! Enjoy the process. Eventually it will be done.

*(The Pile Plan is taken from [The Grief Recovery Handbook](#), by John James and Russell Friedman.)*

## **Maximum Living Support Groups**

*The purpose of the Support Group is to come together and draw strength and support from 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 feel free to attend and know that your 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](http://www.maximumlivingconsult.com)**

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