

Living Through Mourning

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VOLUME FIVE

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Rage, Hopelessness, Despair, Depression (The camera lens focuses for an extreme close up)

By Paivi M. Outinen, RN, LCSW



Death is so very final. We don't have second chances to make it different. We are forced to accept death just the way it happens. Similarly, we have to accept the pain that accompanies loss. We might try to avoid feeling the full impact of the loss but ultimately we don't have a healthy choice in the matter. Attachment to the loved person inevitably leads to pain when that person dies.

Grief is said to be a process, a journey if you will, rather than a singular event. Many researchers have given labels to identify the various parts of the grieving process but they cannot tell us exactly how we will move from one phase to the next. No grief process moves smoothly from one phase to another. Gaining knowledge about the phases of grief, though, can be helpful by giving us some feedback about our progress in grief's journey. Most likely we move in and out of the different phases until we finally come to a full acceptance of life without our loved one.

Once the initial shock and numbness start to wear off, we get a fuller sense of what it means to us that our loved one is gone forever. We feel a fuller impact of the pain and

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Cyclical Upheavals in Grief

By Scott W. Bradley, MSW, CT, CFSP

The dreaded "year of firsts": the first anniversary of a loved one's death, the first birthday without your loved one, and all the holidays throughout the year may overwhelm one's day-to-day coping with a surge in grief. Anniversary reactions are only one type of cyclical grief response a mourner may experience. Other precipitants include holiday reactions, seasonal reactions, ritual-prompted reactions, crisis-evoked reactions, memory-based reactions, reminder-based reactions, reunion-themed reactions, and music-related reactions (Johnson, 1996).

For the most part these grief responses have little disabling effect, but they can induce sharp spikes of grief, and are never far from consciousness. A date, song, or memory becomes the symbolic representation of the loss suffered. Although the mourner does not think of the date, or the song, etc. on a daily basis, when it comes about, the pain of loss flies to the surface. These reactions are believed to be manifestations of an enduring attachment to the deceased, for which everyone suffers to some degree

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Rage, Hopelessness *cont'd*

anguish from the loss. Along with the pain might come other very intense feelings such as anger, guilt, fear, despair, hopelessness, and depression. We might feel vulnerable and confused. We might feel all alone in the world.

Our mind doubts our ability to live without the loved one. We might withdraw from social activities. Activities that used to bring us joy no longer seem meaningful. We yearn to make sense of life and death and we try to gain a sense of control over both. We focus intensely on the deceased and we might become preoccupied with reviewing the events surrounding the death. We hope for the emotional tidal wave to pass and to feel more like our old selves again. We feel like we are living a nightmare and just hope for the morning to come, to wake up and find out that it was all a bad dream.


The only healthy way forward from the second phase in the grief process is to allow our feelings of pain, anger, hopelessness, fear, etc. to be what they are and not try to change them or avoid them. The pain might seem like it will never end, but

those who have gone through it can tell us that it does get better, eventually. We just cannot put a timeline to our suffering. We all must proceed in faith and trust that we will get through the pain and feel different feelings one day.

Please consider the following:

- Distraction from feelings prolongs the grieving process and can put you at risk of creating a prolonged, complicated bereavement. Use distraction only as an emergency measure.
- Some of your friends and family might want to distract you from your feelings and thereby give you the message that grief is unhealthy and morbid. Gently remind them that your grief is natural and expected given the relationship that you had with your loved one.
- Idealization of your loved one is another way to avoid feeling the full impact of your loss. All people have positive and some negative qualities.
- Release your anger by some physical action such as hitting a pillow or mattress, screaming in a car alone,

or by performing strenuous physical tasks.

- Work to resolve your guilt by talking honestly about all that you know about the events surrounding your loved one's death. You might contact a nurse or a doctor who was involved in the loved one's care.
- Write down your fears and doubts. Put all of them into words and examine them as rationally as you can. Share them with a trusted friend to get realistic input from an outsider.
- Do not make quick decisions about moving (if you can avoid it) or other major decisions impacting your life until you feel that you have completed your grief journey. 

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Canine, John D., Ed.D., Ph.D. *The Psychological Aspects of Death and Dying*. Stamford, Connecticut: Appleton&Lange, A Simon & Schuster Company, 1996.

Worden, J. William. *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy, A handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1982.

Cyclical Upheavals *cont'd*

(Gabriel, 1992). For most people this upheaval becomes an integrated and manageable part of life, but for others, it is a threat suppressed through avoidant behavior. For example, one may consume more alcohol around the death anniversary, making them susceptible to accidents.


"When hurt, bitterness and guilt with excessive ambivalence predominate, defensive maneuvers are called into play to keep such reactions out of awareness," (Gabriel, 1992). In general, the more traumatic the death event was for the survivor, the more intense the grief reaction is likely to be. Gabriel states these reactions can be a single, repetitive or generational event.

For some, the cyclical event can be so overwhelming that they become emotionally immobilized, and respond with physical and emotional symptoms to these temporary spikes of grief, such as insomnia, colitis, migraine headache, depressive symptoms, agitation and spikes in aggression.

Although cyclical upheavals in grief are normal, they can be eased. First, anticipating special dates can help decrease anxiety. This brings mourning to awareness, making it more likely to manage. Keep in mind those special days, events, songs, places and times of year that you cherished with your loved one. Knowing in advance that the day may bring a spike of pain can then be planned for. You may need to give yourself permission to leave work, change how a holiday is organized, find time to be with others or be alone, in order to experience your grief on your terms. It is common to get surprised though, so give yourself a break when a sudden spike of grief catches you unaware.

Another tactic to relieve the symptoms of cyclical grief is talking through the thoughts and feelings that erupt. Find someone who you can confide in, your clergyperson, a friend, therapist, support group, or parent, and tell them what you are really thinking. Make them listen, not judge, or try and "fix" you. Make

sure they will accept all your thoughts and feelings, not just the ones they find acceptable, because you may be rageful and/or grateful with the deceased person. If you cannot talk with someone, try to write or express your thoughts through artful actions such as painting.

Remember that temporary upsurges in grief are likely throughout our lives, and the more traumatic the death, the more likely the reaction will be intense. If people complain about dreams, accidents, depression, ulcers, colitis, or suicidal thoughts, be considerate of losses in their lives. Anniversary reactions and other temporary and cyclical responses are subconscious reactions, and the mourner may not even realize that it is a grief response. 

REFERENCES:

Gabriel, (1992). Anniversary Reactions: Trauma Revisited. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 20(2), 179-192. Johnson, Alison. (1996). Remarkable healing through the use of creative therapies.

Paying Tribute: Enduring Memorialization to Soothe the Pain of Grief

By Scott W. Bradley, MSW, CT, CFSP

Memorializing a loved one doesn't end with the funeral. It is an ongoing process, much like mourning itself. Memorials of all types help the bereaved keep a person's spirit present. Come to think of it, our need to memorialize might be considered a gift from the next generation affirming the life of the previous generation. It's a touching way to show you have passed on your spirit, soul, and DNA, to be carried on and remembered by the next generation.

With this in mind, a memorial must echo a family's pride and dignity of the deceased in a distinguished manner. At the time of one's death, funeral rites are personalized to honor the deceased's spirit. Following the funeral, cremation urns and cemetery monuments are engraved with a person's name and dates. Then there are keepsakes which may be purchased, such as a beautiful pendant designed to hold a small portion of cremated remains or a lock of hair, and other jewelry with the fingerprint or even some DNA of the deceased.

You don't have to spend money to memorialize a loved one, though. Be cre-

ative. May I suggest "owning your grief" and when you feel the pain of loss, find a way to soothe that pain with an act of memorialization. For example, you could do an activity that was done with your loved one, you can make a meal that your loved one enjoyed, you could volunteer where your loved one donated funds or you could donate clothing to your loved one's favorite charity. There really is no limit to the ways of memorializing your loved one.

Through "owning" rather than avoiding your grief, you will start to memorialize your loved one in a positive way. At first this will feel a little counter-intuitive. We all want to avoid painful feelings, but it has been my experience that when the bereaved feel a pang of grief it's because they are feeling most intensely about their loved one. Those who avoid this pang of grief become entrenched in the loss, rather than embrace the pang of grief and do something positive with it, thereby synthesizing the loss with positive feelings as well. Nostalgia can be transformed from something depressing to something that gives you strength and builds your resilience.

The Tribute Staff at Bradley & Son

Funeral Homes provides many types of memorialization well after the funeral, from quality cemetery monuments, urns and keepsakes to Celebrant Services on the anniversary date of a loved one's death. We encourage you to think creatively and do what you need to do to take ownership of your grief. We can help with tribute videos, tribute luncheons and dinners, and personalized memorial gardens to name just a few suggestions.

Below is a list of websites that can help you create custom gifts to memorialize your loved one.

Zazzle: www.zazzle.com

Blurb: www.blurb.com


Taste Book: www.tastebook.com

Café Press: www.cafepress.com

Scrap Blog: www.scrapblog.com

Spread Shirt: www.spreadshirt.com

DNA 11: www.dna11.com

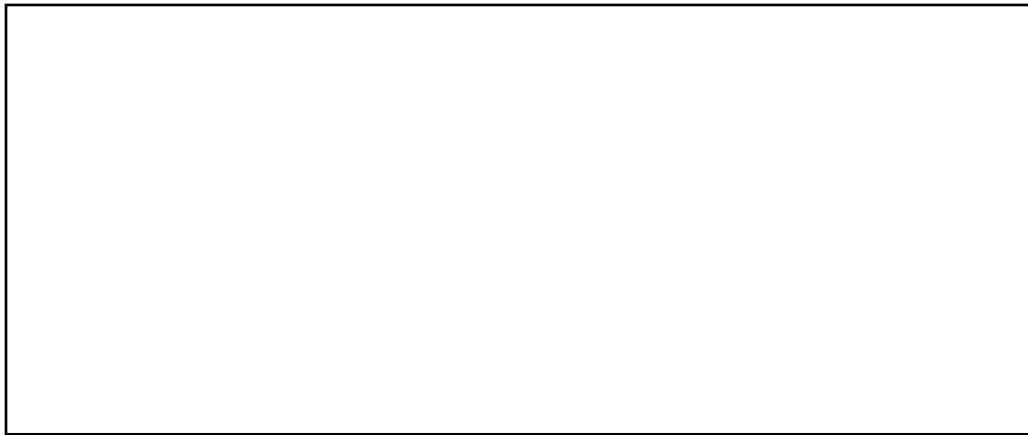
For more information on paying tribute to your loved one, please visit our website at www.bradleyfuneralhomes.com or call 973-635-2428 to speak with your Funeral Director or a Tribute Planner. 

Q&A

Ask Our Bereavement Specialists

I think people have good intentions giving me advice, but they never really ask what I want. I feel stuck with either doing what others want me to do or upsetting them by not doing what they want me to do. How do I deal with these people?

The bereaved individuals are often viewed as vulnerable and as less capable than others. It is true that the bereaved have difficulty with decision making and often feel like they are in "a fog." That is normal. But it is also, more often than not, the discomfort of others with grief that propels them to making decisions and pushing their own agenda on the bereaved. You have to let people know, gently and sometimes even with force, that you would like to be asked if you want to do something or not. You have the perfect right to decline even if it hurts someone's feelings. Ask your friends and family members to be respectful and trust that you will communicate with them about how you are doing and what you need from them.



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Newsletter Feedback "I never thought that I could heal and have a life again. Now, I feel as though I can go forward with my changed life. I know that I can find happiness again. Thank you." **PT, Whippany NJ**

Upcoming Issues

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| VOL. 6 | How Can We Help Bereaved Children? | VOL. 9 | The Complete Picture: It's Still You, But You're Different Now |
| VOL. 7 | A Wider View: Finding a More Life Affirming Outlook | VOL. 10 | Bereavement and Your Physical Health |
| VOL. 8 | Am I Mourning or Am I Depressed? | | |

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