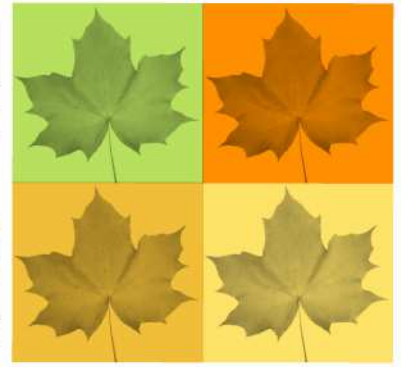


SEASONS

"Embracing the Seasons of Life."



September/October 2009

Grief is not a mountain to be climbed,
 with the strong reaching the summit long before the weak.
 Grief is not an athletic even,
 with stop watches timing our progress.
 Grief is a walk through loss and pain
 with no competition and no time trials.

Talking about death and grief is not easy. It is hard work to grieve, to walk through the loss and pain. We face it a little at a time, taking a few steps forward and then several steps backwards. We struggle to describe our emotions and understand what has happened. We search for how to keep going and begin anew. These are challenging topics for adults.

Teaching children about death and grief is not easy. Many adults choose to avoid the subjects entirely. If children perceive that it is not okay to talk about death and grief with parents or other adults in their lives, they will take their questions and feelings to someone else. Most children become aware of loss, death and grief at an early age, whether we choose to discuss it with them or not. Children see death on television and in the movies. They experience the loss of a pet. A family member or friend may become sick and die. They also experience loss and grief through moves, change of school, and divorce. Rather than trying to hide from the subjects of illness, death, and grief, adults need to help children explore questions and feelings in safe, non-threatening ways. Open exploration helps children to think of death as a natural (even if painful) part of life, rather than a frightening, unnatural occurrence to be dreaded and conquered.

Children experience the same kinds of feelings and questions that adults do, but they experience them on a different scale. Their experiences, memories, perceptions, understandings, and beliefs are most often smaller than those of adults. Their attention span and focus are generally more limited and, therefore, they tend to resolve things much more quickly. Remember, each adult and child is an individual; no two individuals are exactly alike. However, individuals can and do share commonalities.

When teaching children about death and grief it is important to know our own feelings and beliefs about death and grief. It is also important to keep in mind the child's level of understanding. Providing comfort to children who are mourning requires a willingness to listen and to be patient. Listen as they tell what happened from their perspective. Answer their questions with honesty and simplicity. Euphemisms may help you feel better but they aren't helpful to a child. Children can only absorb so much information at one time, so brief and simple is a good approach. As with any new learning, they will ask again and again until they have incorporated the new emotion, belief, or behavior.

Do not be afraid to show emotions to children. By your example you validate the feelings they may be experiencing. Children need to know that they can be sad, cry, laugh, get angry, cling on to, or forget as a normal human being who is not "weak" or "out-of-control".

A controlled silence from adults is much more threatening and difficult for children to cope with. A child's silence does not necessarily mean there are no feelings or questions. The child may be imitating an adult's behavior while keeping feelings bottled up. The child may also simply be waiting for the opportunity or the urge to share.

Showing compassion and an understanding spirit are the best approach. We may not be able to fix the hurt, but sharing the pain is an act of deepest companionship and caring.

Some resources for helping children and adults grieve together:

For young children: *How I Feel: A Coloring Book for Grieving Children*, by Alan Wolfelt
Saying Goodbye, by Jim and Joan Boulden
Aarvy Aardvark Finds Hope, by Donna O'Toole

For Teens: *Facing Change: Falling apart and coming together again in the teen years*, by Donna O'Toole
Death is Hard to Live With, Teenagers Talk About How They Cope With Loss, by Janet Bode
Resilience: Discovering a New Strength at Times of Stress, by Frederic Flach

For Adults: *The Grieving Child: a parent's guide*, by Helen Fitzgerald
The Grieving Teen, by Helen Fitzgerald
Talking About Death: A Dialogue between parent and child, by Alan Wolfelt

For all ages: *Tear Soup*, by Pat Schwiebert and Church DeKlyen
Fat Chance, by Lady Borton
Oma's Quilt, by Paulette Bourgeois
The Old Woman Who Named Things, by Cynthia Rylant

Web-site Resources:

www.americanhospice.org The American Hospice Foundation provides links to many hospice and caregiving resources.

www.dougy.org The Dougy Center of Portland, Oregon was one of the first centers in the USA to provide peer support groups for grieving children. It has helpful information on bereavement for people of all ages.

www.kidsaid.com This is a safe place for children to share their losses and to help each other with their grief. Professionally directed by Cendra Lynn, Ph. D.

www.smartlink.net/~tag/ino.html Teen Age Grief, Inc. a nonprofit organization, has expertise in providing grief support to grieving teens.

If you need to talk with one of our staff, privately, please call the nearest Diakon Hospice Saint John office.

Diakon Hospice Saint John Pastoral Care and Bereavement Team

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*Rev. Peggy Sue Pfeffer
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*Rev. Jane Mason
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(800) 622-3315

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MISSION In response to God's love in Jesus Christ, Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries will demonstrate God's command to love the neighbor through acts of service.



www.diakon.org/hospice

Please remember if you are feeling cut off and alone in your pain, we are here to listen; we do care.

IN THE CASE OF INCLEMENT WEATHER PLEASE CONTACT THE OFFICE TO CONFIRM

ALLENTOWN AREA
Grief Support Group Meetings

Bereavement support is provided by the Allentown chaplain and Diakon Family Life Services. Please contact Chaplain Linda Williams at (610) 391-2308 for information about grief support groups being held in your area.

September/October: Monday evenings 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm Sept. 14, 21, 28, Oct. 5, 12, 19. Lehigh County Senior Citizens, Inc., 1633 Elm St. (Room 106), Allentown, PA 18102.

October/November: Wednesday evenings 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm Oct 14, 21, 28, Nov 4, 11, 18. Union Evangelical Lutheran Church, 5500 Rt. 873, Schnecksville, PA 18078.

WYOMISSING
Grief Support Group Meeting

Bereavement support is provided by Diakon Family Life Services. Please contact Chaplain Lynda Haring at (610) 320-7980 or Family Life Services at (888) 499-2699 for the latest information on the location of these groups.

September/October: Monday evenings 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm Sept. 21, 28, Oct. 5, 12, 19, 26. St John Lutheran Church, 201 E. Main St., Kutztown, PA 19530.

October/November: Monday evenings 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm Oct 5, 12, 19, 26, Nov 2, 9. Kissinger Lutheran Church 715 Berkshire Blvd., Wyomissing, PA 19610.

HAZLETON AREA
Grief Support Group Meetings

These information gatherings are open to all those who are grieving. There is no cost, however, registration is required. For more information or to register for a Grief Support Group please contact Rev. Peggy Sue Pfeffer at (570) 459-6778.

Hazleton: Tuesday, September 8, 2009, 1:30-3:00 p.m. at the rectory of St. Gabriel's Catholic Church, 122 S. Wyoming Street, Hazleton.

Dallas: Tuesday, October 12, 2009, 7:00-8:30 p.m. at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Dallas.

HONESDALE
Grief Support Group Meeting

For more information on Grief Support Groups in this area, please contact the office at (57) 251-8712 or (800) 622-3315.

We've said previously, talking about death and grief is a challenging topic even for adults, much less children. And that children will experience the same kinds of strong emotions, feelings, and questions that adults do. Yet they will indeed experience them on a different scale; a widely varying scale directly related to their age and ability to understand death. With all of that in mind, I would like to review a few tools that I have found to be helpful for families over the years.

The first is a booklet entitled *Helping Your Child Grieve*, designed to help parents take on this challenging responsibility. You can get it from the Channing Bete Publishing Company (www.channing-bete.com). It's strength is that it stresses throughout that children should be given every opportunity to experience and express their grief, and emphasizes that it should be done in a safe and secure environment with plenty of support and attention. I would also recommend it's discussion of how children grieve, broken down into a half-dozen different age groups, as a useful tool for zeroing in on your own child's grief experience. Keep in mind, however, that every child is different and may not experience grief exactly as described here in the different age groups indicated. It goes on from there to describe age appropriate ways in which you might help your child grieve and then answers common questions about saying goodbye, funerals, keeping their memories alive, and more. Finally, it lists alternative sources of help for both you and your child, after all, you need support too.

In conclusion, I would also recommend two other resources that go hand in hand with the first. *When Someone You Love Dies* is an activity and coloring book designed to encourage your younger child to express their grief. *Working Through Grief; A Self-Care Handbook* is resource designed for older children, teenagers, and adults. It gives a good over-view of the grieving process, validates the emotions and feelings they have, and dispels common grief myths. It has interactive exercises to help with coping and encourages and stimulates journaling as a means of expression and developing a plan for healing. Both are also available from Channing Bete Publishing Company.

In conclusion, remember that your child can work through grief – with your help. Grief, is a part of his or hers healing process.