

Grief Matters

On The Journey

Time passes. We notice this especially during this time of the year in Michigan when we see the birds fly south for the winter season. They know it is time to move on and to take flight into the future and change.

Time can be a difficult issue for those who grieve. We may resent time passing because we fear that our memories of our loved one will start to fade. Time might become a heavy burden, not moving fast enough through the grief and pain of loss.

In this issue of Grief Matters you will find that grief can have many effects on our lives; and just like the issue of time, our grief can take us many "places" and produce a myriad of feelings. It is important to remember that we cannot compare our grief; our experience of grief is our own.

Included in this publication is an article exploring the importance of being present to our own grief. Also included is the poem, "Optimism" followed by a reflection on this time we are living in.

Blessings on your journey,

Rev Kris Abbey
Rev. Kris Abbey
Chaplain, Grief Counselor

Are You Feeling Overwhelmed?

It is easy to feel overwhelmed during this stress-filled time, especially when we are grieving. We need to do the work of grieving, but with the added anxiety of the pandemic; the inability to gather with loved ones, the uncertainty about the future we may become immobilized. Here are some helpful ideas on how to manage stress from the book, *Moving through Grief*, Kubacky, G. (2019), p. 57.

1. Focus your eyes on what is right in front of you and give that object your full attention. Breathe deeply, sit quietly, breathing, until you feel calmer.
2. Move your awareness from the difficult emotion you're experiencing to another part of your present experience-like your breath. Keep focusing on your breath.
3. Scan the room, naming 10-20 objects in your head or out loud, like wood wall, brown lamp, etc.

These ideas may help us shift our attention away from all that overwhelms us, if even just for a few moments, to allow us to release tension and offer a time of respite.

THE LEGEND OF THE *Lotus*

Out of the depths and shadows from the bottom of a pond, the lotus emerges, untouched and unstained.

Representing the purity of the mind and soul, the lotus flower is a powerful symbol of peace, hope, transcendence and rebirth. The lotus reminds us to strive through difficulties and that beauty and light can rise from the murky darkness.

Grief Services Online

For information on upcoming grief support meetings and events, visit us online at: hospiceoflansing.org or ioniaareahospice.org.

Mailing List

Please call (877) 882-4500 or e-mail kabbey@hospiceoflansing.org if you wish to be removed from this mailing list.

If you would like to receive this mailing electronically please visit hospiceoflansing.org. Click Resources, Patients & Families, then Grief Support at top of page. Scroll down and you will find the Grief Matters link. Please be assured we do not sell or share our list with other organizations or businesses.

Online Donations

We have made donating to Hospice of Lansing, Stoneleigh Residence, and Ionia Area Hospice even easier! Visit us at hospiceoflansing.org or ioniaareahospice.org to make a donation and save yourself the time to mail in a check!

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Being Present To Our Own Grief

What does “being present” mean? Maybe this illustration will help; all of us have probably experienced those times when we are engaged in conversation with someone and when it was our turn to listen our minds begin to wander and we are off thinking about someone or something else. We are not being present for that person.

There are also times when we may not be present for ourselves, especially in the midst of grief. It may be very difficult to pay attention to what our own needs are or what our own best interest is. Paying attention is important for moving along on the journey of grief.

We may not be paying attention to our health, to what our body is telling us. We may not be paying attention to whether we are taking care of ourselves—are we eating well and getting enough sleep?

We may not be paying attention to how we are dealing with others socially. Are we avoiding social contact and staying to ourselves? Are we experiencing a high degree of anger? These may be signs that we need to talk to someone about what we are experiencing.

We may not be paying attention to the spiritual part of our lives. Are we able to find hope again? Are there unresolved questions about the meaning and purpose of life since the death of our loved one?

It is normal to experience a variety of these feelings and symptoms of grief, but if we are having difficulties—if we feel as if we are stuck in place and can’t move forward—then it can become a problem. That is why being present, paying attention, is so important.

Experiencing many of these feelings and thoughts is completely normal. It is normal to experience these at different times following a loss. We don’t grieve in an orderly way, and each of us grieves differently. However, being present to how we are doing will help us to know if we need help on this journey of grief.

Remember you do not have to “go it alone” as help is available. Individual bereavement counseling is available by phone or through Hospice of Lansing, Stoneleigh Residence and Ionia Area Hospice. Paying attention may

help you determine if you need to talk with someone or see your doctor or mental health professional.

It is important not to ignore your grief or try to make it go away. Grief is a life-long journey, but we have choices that we can make. We can choose to move along the journey, to get help if needed and to look for those things in life that bring joy to us even in the midst of our grief.

Paying attention to our grief may even lead us to a time of discovery. We might find strength that we never knew we had, or re-discover skills long unused, or find a new capability for reaching out in empathy to others—because we have been there. We don’t really like to acknowledge the possibility of “something good” coming out of such a heart-breaking time, but it is indeed possible. The potential is great for each of us who mourn the loss of a loved one to grow and change. We may even feel as if we have been “stretched” into new awareness, knowledge and wisdom. Losing a loved one causes us to reassess our priorities and our values. We might find ourselves asking, “What is important to me now?”

This does not mean we are leaving our loved one behind. It does not mean we are rejecting the past for what may be. It simply means that we are who we are because of our relationship and history with our loved one and because of our experience of loss. Life is filled with loss, pain and grief but in the same way life can be filled with joy, hope and fulfillment.

Grief takes work. It takes paying attention. It takes making choices not to remain stuck in our grief but to move along the journey of grief. It means we must be patient with ourselves. We will always experience grief over our loss, but as we cope and grow, we become reconciled to it. It remains a part of who we are, but it will no longer dominate our lives as it does in the beginning. Yes, there are still moments of deep grief and at times we may yearn for things to be what they once were, but as our journey continues, we find we are able to look forward more than we look back. **Following is a list of signs and symptoms to pay attention to.**

Physical

- Anxiety/heart palpitations
- Lack of energy
- Weight loss/gain
- Physical pain
- Anorexia/GI disturbance
- Muscle weakness
- Loss of sexual desire/hyper-sexuality
- Breathlessness
- Hollowness in stomach

Emotional

- Shock/numbness
- Denial
- Guilt/self-reproach
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Helplessness
- Powerlessness
- Abandonment
- Loneliness
- Regret

Grief Support

Hospice of Lansing/Stoneleigh Residence and Ionia Area Hospice offer grief support. You are welcome to call 517.882.4500 or 877.882.4500 for more information. You may also call and schedule an appointment at your convenience.

Spiritual

- Loss of faith and belief system
- Questions of meaning/purpose
- Loss of self-identity
- Unable to find hope

Cognitive

- Disbelief/denial
- Confusion
- Repetition of events
- Visual/auditory hallucinations
- Forgetfulness/Absentmindedness
- Difficulty concentrating

Behavioral

- Sleep disturbance
- Appetite changes
- Social withdrawal
- Treasuring objects
- Restlessness
- Crying
- Inability to initiate and maintain organized activities

Resilience During a Pandemic



Optimism

*More and more I have come to admire resilience.
Not the simple resistance of a pillow, whose foam
returns over and over to the same shape, but the sinuous
tenacity of a tree: finding the light newly blocked on one side,
it turns in another.. A blind intelligence, true.
But out of such persistence arose turtles, rivers,
mitochondria, figs—all this resinous, unretractable earth.*

- Jane Hirshfield -

(Given Sugar, Given Salt)

During this time of change, anxiety, loss, uncertainty, grief... we may need a reminder about tenacity and resilience. The tree in the poem gets its strength and energy from the sun. It knows how to do this—as this poem describes.

Our task in life is to figure out where/in what way we find our strength and energy; our tenacity and resilience. This is a life-long journey of discernment with many twists and turns along the way. It is a journey that requires an inner search, no one else can do it for us. But then, as we do this work, along the way we find what it is that grounds us, what we can depend on, especially if we create the space for finding our grounded-ness.

We are all longing for “normal” but our normal will never be the same as it was prior to this pandemic. But as we do this work of discernment, remember and hold on to this. A new normal is not about leaving all that we knew behind, but of bringing what we need that is life-giving and important to us as well as moving into what is emerging; what is full of possibilities, full of hope and the potential for us to come to a greater understanding of ourselves and our world.