

Grief MATTERS

JULY/AUGUST 2021

*“There is no normal life that is free of pain.
It’s the very wrestling with our problems
that can be the impetus for our growth.”*

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO MR. ROGERS (PAGE 112)

On The Journey

Sometimes we do not want to grow. It is just too hard! Fred Rogers speaks to the truth of our lives; there is pain and suffering, however there also can be new life and new growth. Yet we must be willing to do the work of grieving; sometimes 24/7, other times allowing ourselves to step back a bit to catch our breath and gather our strength. It can be a delicate balance-to keep moving ahead in grief work and claiming time to just “be.”

No amount of knowledge can prepare us for our loss. Grieving is a journey with many common elements. Knowing what to expect is helpful. Knowing that each person’s journey is different can be helpful. Our experience of grief often depends on the relationship, how long we have known our loved one, how long or short the illness, and how we cope with the difficulties of life and loss.

Understanding what one may expect while grieving can help us

deal with the issues of grief. It helps us to know that “I’m not really going crazy” when we find ourselves confused, unable to concentrate, angry, numb.... Understanding helps us to know that this is all part of the journey of grief. However, it is important to seek help from a professional if our grief interrupts our ability to function. Talking to a trusted, non-judgmental friend, seeing a counselor or a pastor, or talking with the bereavement support team at Hospice of Lansing/Ionia Area Hospice may be the next step.

Grieving is hard work. But we must mourn our losses so that we can live more fully, again.

Blessings on your journey.


Rev. Kris Abbey
Chaplain, Grief Counselor

*Grief Matters is
published bi-monthly.*

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

Mailing List

Please call (517) 882-4500 or e-mail kabbey@hospiceoflansing.org if you wish to be removed from this mailing list.

To view Grief Matters online please visit hospiceoflansing.org. Using the drop-down menu under Resources, hover over Patients & Families, then click on Grief Support. Scroll down and you will find the links to our most recent issues.

If you would like to receive a physical copy, please fill out the form on the same page, next to the links. Please be assured we do not sell or share our list with other organizations or businesses.

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

Children, Youth And Grief

Adults in the family unit who are dealing with feelings of grief and loss may find it difficult to help children and teenagers who are also experiencing the same loss.

Grief causes us to feel overwhelmed and exhausted, and so it can be a challenge to find the inner energy needed to help others. It is important as parents, grandparents, or any significant adult not to shut down because the pain is too difficult. Withdrawing or stuffing your emotions down does not help you or your children. Talking about your grief, feelings, and needs is very important, especially since children and teenagers look to the adults in their lives for guidance. In this way they find a model on how to mourn.

Sharing your own grief allows young people to know it is okay to respond to the death of a loved one by tears, sadness and loss of energy. They then begin to understand that these are all valid aspects of mourning.

You may have to help children to talk about their experiences. Sharing their thoughts, reactions, and feelings allows them to give voice to their experience and it helps them to normalize and accept their feelings. Finding ways for children to be involved in the activities that surround the death of a loved one is helpful. Helping to put together a collection of family pictures, writing a letter to their family member or friend that can be placed in the casket, making a scrapbook, or planting a special garden in memory of their loved one are some ideas on helping children grieve and to help them feel included at this difficult time.

Children understand death differently than adults. The following is a brief description on how children and teens understand death. This is only a generalized description, but it may help you to understand what your children and teens are feeling.

Very young children understand death as a temporary condition. Just as in the games we play with children, such as peek-a-boo, they expect people to reappear. They do not understand the permanence of death.

Children to the age of six still do not understand that death is final. They may also believe that they can “wish” another person to die or to return to life.

As children grow and reach the age of about ten years they begin to understand that death is final. Therefore they may begin to fear that they will die. Children of this age begin to think about the meaning of life and what happens after death.

In this way they find a model on how to mourn.

Between the ages of ten to twelve children become interested in learning the facts surrounding the death and can understand most

of the information. They may also worry about who will take care of the surviving family member/s.

Teens feel threatened by death because they realize that things will never be the same again. Some teens reject funeral customs in an attempt to avoid death, and they may also want to mourn in private or with their friends.

When talking with your young family members think about their level of understanding and their coping patterns. Answer their questions truthfully and simply, but only answer what is being asked. Encourage their expression of feelings and accept them. Avoid using terms like “gone away”, “sleeping”, or “passed on.” Share your feelings and beliefs with them, always offering your love and support.

Hospice of Lansing/
Stoneleigh Residence and
Ionia Area Hospice offer
free bereavement
counseling to community
members and families who
have used our hospice
service. Please call for
grief support.

Hospice of Lansing/
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877.882.4500 or
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Facing Loss

“You know it is a miracle to breathe.” These words were spoken by a hospice patient I was visiting to a friend who had called during my visit. As I sat by her bed I couldn’t help but ponder this deep, heartfelt truth.

It was a very powerful statement for this young woman to voice aloud as she was traveling the solitary road toward the end of her life.

Life’s defining moments help us to clarify what we believe, feel, understand and claim as truth for ourselves.

In these moments we come face-to-face with our regrets, joys, heartaches, losses, fears, despair.... If we are open to these moments they offer us an opportunity to look at our lives; past, present, and future.

All of us face the defining time in life of mourning the loss of a loved one. We all face choices in life. That young woman’s choice was to face her grief and to look deeply into her own life and loss and discover what would give her strength and courage. How else could she so eloquently voice the truth she claimed for herself? Life is indeed a gift.

How do we choose to face our grief after losing a loved one? At first, we may only be capable of getting one foot out of bed. But as time moves along, we eventually are able to stand upright. This may sound glib but there is truth in this statement. Grief can be debilitating. Mourning is hard work. It is only by working through our grief and becoming reconciled to it that we have the potential, to again, live a full life.

What might you and I learn about ourselves if we had the resolve to look within to discover our own inner strength and courage? What might we find within ourselves that we didn’t know we possessed to face each day; bearing our loss but also drawing on the love and memories of our beloved family member or friend who has died.

Looking at these times is not a one-time occurrence, but a life-long practice which allows us to be comfortable with paradox and mystery enabling us to live a full life in the midst of loss.

Volunteer Stories

Given that the end-of-life journey is full of ups and downs for the residents and their closest friends and family, I enjoy being a stable face in this time of struggle. Volunteering at Stoneleigh Residence provides me an opportunity to offer warmth in the form of a smile or a cup of coffee.

As someone who lost a father to cancer, I understand the unpredictable emotions that surround the end-of-life journey. Hospice offered me and my family the gift of stability and predictability and that is exactly why I wanted to “pay It forward” as a volunteer. Knowing the value of being “at home” when going through this challenging journey, I wanted to provide the simple comforts at Stoneleigh that so many enjoy about being in their home. By talking with the residents and their significant companions, I’m able to meet the individual needs—be it fulfilling a request for a nice glass of ice water, a warm meal from our amazing cooks, or helping by dusting and mopping the floors.

I know from traveling this journey with my father that independence is a difficult thing to lose, so maintaining the dignity of each resident and letting each beautiful person direct his or her care is important. It brings absolute joy to serve in this capacity.

Not only do I feel I am able to serve the residents and families at Stoneleigh, I receive so much in return. Talking with the residents always provides such interesting and rich history. Hearing stories about family members, previous employment, motherhood, fatherhood, and individual interests enriches my understanding about the gifts that our residents have brought to our earth.

Finally, being around staff and other volunteers who care so deeply about the mission of hospice and the dignity of humanity fills me with hope that our world can be made better one relationship at a time. Thank you to the residents and families who have embraced my service and have allowed me to be a part of such a challenging and spiritual journey.

— Nic, Volunteer