



IT'S ABOUT LIFE

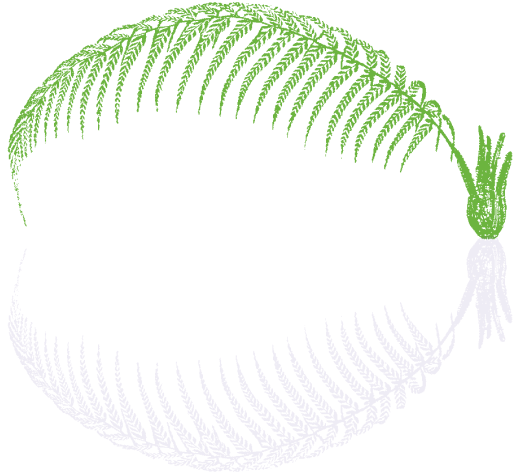


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Serving San Mateo County since 1979

Moving through loss...
BEREAVEMENT SERVICES





*“Sorrow, like the river, must be given vent
lest it erode its banks.”*

-Earl Grollman

Grief Is.....

Grief is a normal response to loss. It is painful to lose someone you love and the pain of loss can be profound.

Each of us experiences grief differently. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Try to ignore all the “how to grieve” advice that others may give us.

Grief can affect all aspects of our lives – psychological, physical, social and spiritual.

Grief involves many different emotions – sadness, loneliness, guilt, anger, helplessness, anxiety, fear, confusion and relief. These emotions may come in unpredictable waves. They can be triggered by the tiniest thing – a scent, a line of music, a face in a crowd – or nothing at all. They may repeat themselves in a cyclical fashion and/or change over time.

Grief may make it difficult to concentrate, remember things, and make decisions. Because of this, we may feel we are “going crazy.” We are not. This is a normal part of grief.

Grieving people may feel exhausted much of the time. It takes a great deal of energy to carry the intense feelings of grief and learn to live without our loved one. It is common to experience a change in sleep patterns, a loss of appetite, and physical symptoms. It is important to see a doctor before you assume the symptoms are due to grief.

Grief prompts us to question and search for meaning. Our belief in the order and kindness of the world may be shaken. We may question our spiritual beliefs. We may ask “Why?” and ponder the meaning of death for our own lives.

The process of grief gives us choices. We can choose to grieve in a way that is right for us. Grief challenges us to find our unique strengths and offers the opportunity for transformation – personal growth and new meaning in our lives.

We do not “get over” grief and return to “normal.” Grief will change us forever.

Suggestions for Healing

The following suggestions are just that – suggestions. They may or may not work for you. Listen to that voice within you that is telling you how you need to grieve. Follow the path that is right for you.

Grieving the death of someone close to you can be both physically and emotionally exhausting. Even the smallest tasks of daily living can be overwhelming. It is important to be good to yourself. Put aside what is unnecessary and, instead, focus on what nourishes and restores you and allows you to grieve.

Attend to your physical health and well-being. A healthy diet, plenty of rest and regular exercise provide a good buffer against the stress of grieving. Do not neglect your routine health care and consult a doctor if you experience any new symptoms.

It may be tempting to use alcohol or drugs to numb the pain of grief. This only postpones the necessary process of healthy grieving and can have adverse effects on your health.

Give yourself permission to grieve and the time to do it. Open yourself to every feeling that may come along. Give yourself both time alone and time with others whom you trust and who will listen. Be patient with yourself. Do not be discouraged if, at times, you feel that you are taking one step forward and two steps backwards. Such is the nature of grief. It is true that time does heal.

Give yourself permission to do the things that make you feel good, that comfort you, that give you respite from the pain of grief... a long walk, a good novel, a movie, dinner with a friend. Balance is important. Simple pleasure is good nourishment.

Share your loss with others. Find those who will listen without judgment. Talk about your loss with family and friends who are grieving the same loss. Talk about your loss with someone who is not affected by the loss. The company of others, each with a different perspective, can be valuable.

Trust your instincts and honor your needs. They will, no doubt, vary from day to day – even from moment to moment. You may have plans with someone and, at the last minute, have an overwhelming need to be alone. Allow yourself to cancel. The emotions of grief can be very unpredictable.

Although grieving is a normal response to loss, there are times when people need professional help with their grief. If your grief is seriously impacting other areas of your life (loss of relationships or a job), if you are engaging in self-destructive

behaviors or having active suicidal thoughts, if after an extended period of time you continue to have no interest in life, or if others or you, yourself, feel that you need help, please find it. It is a sign of strength, not weakness, to seek help.

If spirituality or religion is an important part of your life, you are probably well aware of how it can support and comfort you. Simple prayer can be sustaining. Religious and spiritual communities, beliefs and rituals can all be a great source of strength to one who is grieving. It is not uncommon for loss to raise questions and doubts about one's faith. If you are experiencing such doubts, find someone to talk with about them.

Remembering and honoring those who have mattered deeply to us remind us that, even though they are no longer physically present, our relationship with them continues. Our memories bring our loved ones into the present and remind us that they can continue to enrich our lives. Honoring our loved ones can help give meaning to a loss. Some ways we can do this are through rituals, artwork, and writing, creating an altar or garden, or supporting a good cause.

"In the midst of winter, I found that there was, within me, an invincible summer."

-Albert Camus



BEREAVEMENT SERVICES

Because grief is a normal response to loss, it is not a "condition" that needs to be treated. But support groups and individual grief counseling can be a great source of support for those who are grieving or those who are facing the death of a loved one.

Grief support offers a place where you can:

- Express your feelings of grief and be validated.
- Learn about the grief process
- Reflect upon your natural strengths and use them to get through this difficult time.
- Talk about your loved one and tell the story over and over again.
- Sort through the stresses and anxieties that may come with new roles and responsibilities of caregiving and loss.
- Openly struggle with questions like: Why did this happen? What meaning does this have for me and my life? How do I want to move forward?

Support groups offer a unique opportunity to share in the grieving experiences of others. For some, this can provide an invaluable sense of "being understood." Others find individual counseling most helpful. And, for some, the two may complement each other.

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP

Our bereavement support group meets at our Mission Hospice office located at 1900 O'Farrell Street, Suite 200, San Mateo, 650-554-1000. This group is for those who are grieving a loss from a death. Although the group is offered free of charge, donations are gratefully accepted. For more information, please call us or visit our web site.

INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING

We offer supportive counseling sessions without charge to patients and family members while the patient is receiving our service. We offer eight bereavement counseling sessions to family members of our patients. For those who want to continue beyond the eight sessions, we charge a fee with a sliding scale. Finally, we offer counseling to members of the community who are anticipating or have experienced a death. We charge a fee with a sliding scale.



*"Give sorrow words;
the grief that does not speak,
Whispers the o'er-fraught heart
and bids it break."*

-Shakespeare

"It is the nature of grace always to fill spaces that have been empty."
- Goethe



Bereavement Services are provided by our Bereavement Coordinator
Cindy Carlson, MD, MFT

I am a licensed physician, but have not practiced for some time. As an internist, I was constantly struck by the interplay between emotional and physical well-being -- the profound impact that illness can have on the emotional lives of both patients and their families and, conversely, the effect that anxiety, depression and the stresses of living can have on one's physical health. My patients often needed to talk about aspects of their lives that lay behind their symptoms. I knew that, for many, talking was as important to their well-being as any medication that I could prescribe. I loved this aspect of patient care and was greatly frustrated by what little time I could give to it in a medical practice. I made the decision to redirect professionally into counseling/psychotherapy, wanting to work in an area where counseling interfaces with medicine.

Hospice care is a natural interface between the two. I work with patients themselves, family members who are struggling with the stresses of caregiving and impending loss, and bereaved individuals who are grieving a loss that has occurred.

People ask me what I love about my work. It is this. Those who are struggling with great loss find their strengths and rise to the occasion and, in doing so, use their experience of loss in a transformative way -- to grow, to find meaning from their loss. There is something noble and honorable in this. It is a privilege to watch it happen.



Living Memory

Recently I read, with great delight, a book about Louis XIV of France, the great Sun King. In the book, the author uses the phrase "in living memory" to speak of the way in which the eldest individuals in a generation will be able to reach back into their childhood memories to recall those events and people that will seem dim, far distant, exotic and mysterious to those who are much younger.

While I was reading this book, a friend of mine died. He had suffered all his life with a congenital heart condition that would have debilitated most people and set them off on a life confined primarily to bed. With his tremendous will and great love of learning he had gone on to become a chiropractor, a psychologist and health educator. He was waiting, at the time of his death, for a new heart.

As I thought of him, I recalled his joy in his life, his laughter and his love of family and friends. His appreciation of having been given one more day seemed to shine from him, like a new coin held in the light. Ah, I thought, this is what living memory really is: it is the life that those we love give us in our memories of them. In the same way that a generator is the source of energy for electricity, living memory serves as a generator of emotional and spiritual energy in our own lives long after those we love have gone.

Living memory is a never ending source of renewal and regeneration. We have only to take the time to go back and live with them a bit in our memories to bring the grace and beauty of their gifts along with us moment by moment as we create our lives with them in mind.

Taun Relihan, RN, MS, MA, PhD.