

PERSPECTIVES ON
LOSS & GRIEF
ISSUE 5

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TRANSITIONS

A HOSPICE BEREAVEMENT NEWSLETTER

Dear Friends of Hospice:

Two natural and normal emotions experienced after the death of a loved one are guilt and anger. Not everyone experiences these feelings, but for those who do, they are often frightening and misunderstood. If these emotions are not dealt with properly, they can cause you to lose perspective on life.

Because it is important to understand the powerful emotions of guilt and anger during the grief process, this month's newsletter will address these two topics.

Sincerely,

The Bereavement Team

Tabitha Hospice, A Collaboration with Immanuel

EXPERIENCING GUILT

Many bereaved people feel some degree of guilt—guilt for what they did or didn't do when their loved one was alive:

“If only I had been there.”

“What if I had insisted she go to the doctor sooner?”

“I should have been more understanding.”

“I shouldn't have lost my temper.”

Unfortunately, in grief, most of our guilt comes from things we cannot change. All the “should haves,” “what ifs,” and “if onlys” cannot be undone. However, none of us can live closely with another person and love deeply without doing or saying things that we later regret.

We are all imperfect human beings with imperfect relationships. When a loved one has died, we are reminded of those hurts and

Words of *Wisdom*

**“Guilt is perhaps
the most painful
companion of death.”**

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

**“Live through the hurt
so the joy can return to
warm your heart.”**

Darcie D. Sims

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It is natural to examine the past after a death has occurred. You become acutely aware of past mistakes and failures. Try to accept the fact that the past is past—it cannot be changed. You already have enough pain without punishing yourself more. A wise member of the clergy once said, “I believe that God forgives you. The question now is, ‘Will you forgive yourself?’”

If you find yourself going over and over your regrets, get up, change your position or the room you are in. Physically move somewhere else for a little while to give your mind a change of pace.

If you truly have some regrets about what you may have said or done or failed to do, admit it, accept it and let it go. Hanging onto guilt is unhealthy and keeps your wounds open, preventing you from growing and being who you really are.

OTHER RESOURCES

For additional support, please contact our Hospice Bereavement Team at 402.819.4949.

For additional reading materials, please contact The Centering Corporation at 866.218.0101 or www.centering.org



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failings, real or imagined, of words we regret saying, incidents we'd like to forget, actions we'd like to take back.

These feelings of guilt are normal, though often not realistic. Some bereaved become tortured by their feelings of guilt, and it colors their whole life.

Guilt is a strong emotion that is often magnified because the bereaved are in an extremely vulnerable state. The guilt is often experienced when the bereaved tries to answer the unanswerable, "Why did my loved one have to die?" When someone has died of a prolonged illness, a loved one may have sat by the bed and wished or prayed for death to come. This is normal and doesn't mean a lack of love, but afterward, guilt can creep in.

SUGGESTIONS FOR HANDLING GUILT

If you feel guilty, it is helpful to admit it to yourself.

- › It is important to be truthful about why you feel guilty.
- › Keeping your guilt inside can limit your ability to cope and take care of yourself.

Talk about your guilt until you can let go.

- › Ask yourself what things specifically are bothering you most.
- › Talk over things with someone who will listen, care and not judge.

Forgive yourself. Ask for the forgiveness of your loved one and of God.

- › You are usually harder on yourself than on anyone else.
- › Forgive yourself and let go of your guilt.
- › If your faith is shaken, try to put your religious beliefs back together and find comfort in your religion.

Ask yourself if you want to live with guilt the rest of your life.

- › Realize that sometimes you are powerless and can't control everything that happens.
- › Remember, there is not always an answer to "why" and you don't need to place blame.

Remember that you are human.

- › No one is perfect. Accept your imperfections.
- › Realize you did the best you could do under the circumstances.

Write about your feelings of guilt to the person who died.

- › You can say everything you wish you had said earlier.

Tell living people that you care about them.

- › If it is too hard to verbalize, send a card and write it inside.

EXPERIENCING ANGER

- › Anger is a natural and normal part of grief. It is a legitimate protest about a loss:

"Why me?"

"What did I do to deserve this?"

"It just isn't fair!"

The anger may be directed toward many different avenues:

- › You may be angry at the disease that took your loved one's life.
- › You may be angry at the doctors or others in the medical field.
- › You may be angry at family members who are grieving differently than you.
- › You may be angry at friends who don't seem to understand.
- › You may be angry at God for allowing this death to happen.
- › You may be angry at your loved one for dying.

Is it all right to be angry at God? Someone once said, "God has broad shoulders. He can take it." Feel free to tell God about your anger. Tell God exactly how you feel.

To some people, it may seem strange to be angry at the person who died. But this is not strange at all. A spouse may be left with children to raise, a house to keep up alone, problems with finances, etc. It is normal to react with anger at a loved one for leaving.

When someone you care about dies, there is nothing you can do to bring them back. This loss of control can come out as anger. Attempting to understand how this loss has hurt you will give you greater control over the emotion of anger. Although some people think of anger as being bad, the emotion of anger is neither good nor bad, right nor wrong. What you do with your anger, however, can be bad. It should never be used to hurt yourself or someone else. Some healthy ways to deal with anger could include:

- › Exercise: walk, run, shoot baskets, clean your house.
- › Turn up your stereo and scream really loudly.
- › Hit your mattress with a rolled-up towel or a tennis racket.
- › Scream at an empty chair.
- › Hit a garbage can or cardboard box with a baseball bat.
- › Pound on a stack of pillows.
- › Write a letter expressing your anger.
- › Talk to someone who cares about you.
- › Cry.

When anger is not expressed, it builds up inside and becomes explosive, coming out at inappropriate times. Keeping it inside can also make you bitter. Putting into words how angry you are can lessen the anger episode. These words may need to be repeated each time the anger resurfaces. As your pain subsides, so will your anger.