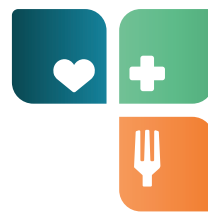


Sharing the Journey



Visiting Nurse Association

Meals on Wheels
Hospice & Palliative Care

A BEREAVEMENT PUBLICATION OF VNA HOSPICE CARE

Coping with Anxiety in Grief

By Susan Bryan, MA, LPC - Former VNA Bereavement Coordinator

You are reading this because you are grieving the death of someone very close to you, someone you loved very much. The death of someone we love is scary and stressful. We feel helpless and uncertain, and wonder if we can go on living without them. We don't know what the future looks like without them, and we don't know how to fill the void in our lives that their death has caused.

You are most likely to be experiencing common feelings and reactions in grief – deep sadness, exhaustion, confusion, inability to focus or concentrate, lethargy, loneliness, anger, regret, and anxiety. Adding to all these grief feelings and reactions, you are probably starting to think and perhaps get anxious about the upcoming holidays. Continuing to live in this COVID time can also intensify feelings of stress and anxiety in grief.

It is so important to be gentle with yourself and take care of yourself. Take time to rest, grieve and cry as you need to. Do what is soothing and calming that helps bring you peace and comfort. When we are stressed or scared, we forget to breathe, or we breathe very shallowly. Take time to just sit, with your feet firmly on the ground, and breathe slowly and deeply from your diaphragm. Set a timer if you are afraid you will fall asleep. Play soft music, light a candle, close your eyes, or choose a focal point to look at while you pay attention to your breathing. Other things to do when you are feeling anxious include taking a warm bath, listening to peaceful and calming music,

and going outside and paying attention to the beauty around you. When you are feeling fearful and alone, reach out and talk with family and close friends who “get” your sadness and grief.

Sometimes the fear and anxiety are heightened and turn into panic attacks. These sudden and intense events seem to come out of nowhere, so it's important to know what contributes to these episodes. When we are anxious, we have physical symptoms such as shortness of breath, heart palpitations, chest pressure, dizziness, nausea, weakness, and tense muscles.

When you are experiencing severe stress and anxiety, some simple practices can make a difference as you deal with your fear:

- Practice deep breathing and feeling your feet firmly on the ground. Stay focused and feel grounded in the present moment.
- Make a list of the things that make you nervous and fearful – situations, places, people, certain times of the day or week.
- Examine your thoughts about these stressful situations. What are you telling yourself when you feel anxious? (Examples - “I won't be able to make it without my loved one”, “I will be all alone”, “I can't handle everything I have to do.”)
- When your thoughts spin like this into anxiousness, catch yourself, and replace the fearful thoughts with positive and strong thoughts and affirmations: “I am strong”, “I

Continued on next page

The Visiting Nurse Association Hospice Care Bereavement Staff hope the information in this quarterly newsletter will comfort, educate, and support you in your time of grief.

FALL 2025

Coping with Anxiety in Grief

By Susan Bryan, LPC, Former VNA Bereavement Coordinator (cont.)

can do this”, “I am not alone”, and “I will get through this”.

- Practice. It takes a while to recognize and replace your anxious thoughts with positive thoughts. With practice, it will become easier and will help you journey through grief in healthier and calmer ways.
- Consider what you might change about these times, places, and situations to make them less anxiety-producing. Consider what you might decide to do differently, or eliminate, that will help with your anxiety and stress.
- Journal or make a list of the practices, places and people that are calming for you. How can you incorporate more of these into your everyday life?

- Do what works for you. Do what helps bring you comfort, peace, and calm.

Know that we are all created to be resilient in the face of sadness and stress. You will make it through the grief you are experiencing now. Your grief will get less intense. It will get better. If you are having extreme panic attacks that are concerning to you or your loved ones, it's important to seek professional help. Please reach out to us if we can help support you in your grief process.

For further reading on this subject, we recommend *Anxiety: The Missing Stage of Grief – A Revolutionary Approach to Understanding and Healing the Impact of Loss* by Claire Bidwell Smith, LCPC.



The Sacrament of Waiting

Seasons of Your Heart by Macrina Wiederkehr

Slowly
she celebrated the sacrament of letting go.
First she surrendered her green,
then the orange, yellow, and red
finally she let go of her brown.
Shedding her last leaf
she stood empty and silent, stripped bare.
Leaning against the winter sky
she began her vigil of trust.

Shedding her last leaf
she watched its journey to the ground.
She stood in silence
wearing the color of emptiness,
her branches wondering;
How do you give shade with so much gone?

And then,
the sacrament of waiting began.
The sunrise and sunset watched with
tenderness.
Clothing her with silhouettes
they kept her hope alive.

They helped her understand that
her vulnerability,
her dependence and need,
her emptiness,
her readiness to receive
were giving her a new kind of beauty.
Every morning and every evening they stood
in silence
and celebrated together
the sacrament of waiting.

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Holiday Activities for Grieving Children

Sue Rafferty, LMSW, Former VNA Bereavement Coordinator

Holidays can be especially challenging for grieving families. Grieving children who have lost loved ones still find magic in the holidays, and want them to be a special time of year.

It's important to talk about the person who died, and talk about your grief. This gives permission for memories and feelings to be shared or questions to be asked. If the person who died is never mentioned, children will learn that this is a forbidden subject. They may stuff down their grief or pretend the loss is affecting them less than it really is.

Children often are more able to talk about their loved ones when they are doing a craft or other activity. Here are some ways loved ones can be honored in the holiday season, or any time of year:

- Make ornaments using photos or drawings.
- Make special gifts from the clothing of the person who died. Sewing projects can include stuffed animals, pillows, quilts, purses, or tote bags. Someone else may be able to help with the sewing if you gather the materials.
- Share memories of the person who died. Ask about times that were funny, happy,

frustrating, loving, or scary. Draw pictures of memories. These could be included in a scrapbook.

- Create a place for remembering the person who died, and decorate it with pictures, keepsakes, greens, flowers, candles, or ornaments.
- Have each person write down stories of their loved one, or draw pictures. Put them into a specially decorated box. Designate a family gathering time to bring them out and talk about them.
- Light a candle for the person who died.
- Decorate the grave-site with flowers, ornaments, or a small Christmas tree.
- Donate to a charity or cause in honor of the person. Have the children write a note that they are honoring the person, share a memory, or illustrate the note.
- Look through photographs or watch videos of the person who died.
- Give gifts to each other in memory of your loved one.

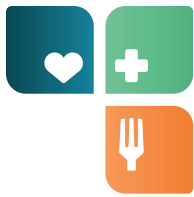
Participating in holiday activities can help children and family members heal and be comforted during a difficult time. May you have peace in this season.

**To honor your loved ones
during the holidays.**

**For more information, visit
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For more information, email gethelp@vnatexas.org or contact your local VNA branch:

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VNA encourages family members to wait a minimum of one year following the death of a loved one before serving as a hospice patient care volunteer or bereavement support volunteer.