Sharing the Journey

Visiting Nurse Association
Meals on Wheels
Hospice & Palliative Care

A Bereavement Publication of VNA Hospice Care

Saying Goodbye to Your Loved One's Belongings

By Susan Bryan, LPC – Former VNA Bereavement Coordinator

The aftermath of your loved one's death is a difficult and challenging process. You are already exhausted from the caregiving and death. After the death there is much more to do and it can be overwhelming. You are flooded with emotions of shock, numbness, deep sadness, anger, anxiety, guilt, regret, loneliness, and longing for them to return. These are all normal grief feelings and reactions, yet you may feel you are going crazy or will never be happy again. Grief is such a long and winding process and journey. With time and attention to your grief feelings and reactions, you can and will be happy again.

Grief is hard work. One of the topics that comes up most often in our grief groups is about getting rid of your loved one's belongings. This is so difficult and emotionally charged, since their things remind you of them, represent who they were, and bring back so many memories. Sometimes well-meaning family members swoop in after the death and say you need to get rid of these things now. Maybe you're not ready and maybe you will never be, and that's okay. There is no hurry or deadline to get this done. Set boundaries and say no when you aren't ready.

If you are ready and want to start the sorting out process, you might keep these suggestions in mind:

- Only get rid of things that you are certain about. Once gone, you can't get these things back.
- First, give your family a chance to take the things that you don't mind giving away that they will treasure and enjoy.
- Holidays, when you are all together, are great times to let family members take a few items that will be meaningful for them from a collection or room.
- Ask a friend or family member to help with this process so you aren't all alone. Make sure this trusted person will go at your pace and respect your wishes on what to keep and what to get rid of.

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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.

SUMMER 2024

Saying Goodbye to Your Loved One's Belongings *(cont)*

By Susan Bryan, LPC – Former VNA Bereavement Coordinator

- Set an intention for what you want to get done and how long you will spend – an hour, a half day, all day, or one week.
- It can be tempting to put everything in storage to deal with later. However, these things will probably sit there a long time until someone else throws them away later.
- Start with a room that will be the least emotional and easier to clear out. You might start with the bathroom or other small room.

- Have piles: Keep for Yourself (or think about, for now), Give to family/friends; Throw Away, Give to Charity, Sell
- Consider saving some of your loved one's clothing for someone to make pillows or quilts out of them for you and family members.
- If there are things that are important to you that you don't have room for or don't want to keep, take photos of them to be able to look at later.
- Donate these items to a charity that really needs them or sell them to persons who really need them.
- Wait until later to look through old photos and read cards or letters. If they are important to you, save them for now and do this later.
- Use a company who specializes in helping with this process like Caring Transitions. They help sort things out and then hold an estate sale, where you will receive a portion of the proceeds.

Going through your loved one's belongings is such an arduous and emotional task. Go at your own pace. Break this process down in doable parts. Take care of yourself with frequent breaks. Let yourself cry when you need to – tears are normal and healing. Be flexible and gentle with yourself. Don't try to do this all alone – get the help of others. Most of all, do what works for you and brings you peace, comfort and meaning.

Please Ask

Someone asked me about you today.
It's been so long since anyone has done that.
It felt so good to talk about you,
to share my memories of you,
to simply say your name out loud.
She asked me if I minded talking about
what happened to you —
or would it be too painful to speak of it.
I told her I think of it every day
and speaking about it helps me to release
the tormented thoughts whirling around in
my head.
She said she never realized the pain
would last this long.
She apologized for not asking sooner.
I told her, "Thanks for asking."
I don't know if it was curiosity
or concern that made her ask,
But told her, "Please do it again sometime —
soon."

— Barbara Taylor Hudson

Grieving Styles

Sue Rafferty, LMSW, Bereavement Coordinator, Dallas and Kaufman County

Some years ago, I went to a workshop called "Beyond Gender: Understanding the Ways Men and Women Grieve," presented by Kenneth Doka, PhD, and Terry Martin, PhD. Dr. Doka and Dr. Martin talked about the different ways people cope with grief. They have found there are two main grieving styles, which they call intuitive and instrumental, with most grievers tending to be one, the other, or a blend of the two. The expression of grief does not always follow gender lines; however, many women grieve intuitively, and many men grieve instrumentally. Neither style of grieving is right or wrong, they are just different.

Intuitive grievers have intense feelings, and cope with grief by expressing emotions. They cry easily and talk freely when they can find a supportive person. Intuitive grievers need safe places to share feelings, and often benefit from support groups. They may be overwhelmed by their feelings and may have difficulty organizing, thinking, or planning what to do. It can be helpful for intuitive grievers to find time each day to allow for grief and release emotions.

Instrumental grievers experience grief physically and cognitively. They may be reluctant to talk about feelings, but will think about the person who died, and may problem-solve as a way of coping. They often deal with issues intellectually, and may not be able to cry. They may talk about what they've been thinking rather than feeling, and may use humor or tell stories about the person who died. Frustration or anger may be the main emotion expressed. Instrumental grievers often prefer solitude and independence. They may connect with their loved ones through activities in honor or remembrance of them. Instrumental grievers may create something, plant a tree, build a garden, work with a loved one's tools, do an activity formerly shared with the loved one, release stress through exercise, journal, or visit the grave. To an observer, the person may not be grieving, but these actions allow for grief work, in a quiet, less visible way.

Blended grievers use a mix of the two coping styles. Grievers sometimes also experience dissonant grief, where they suppress their natural grieving style. Some men are intuitive grievers but feel pressured to avoid tears, buck up, and "take it like a man." Women who are instrumental grievers may feel judged by others because they do not cry or share about their feelings. Each person may need encouragement to find expressions of grief that work well for him or her.

Family misunderstandings can happen because grieving styles vary. It may be helpful to recognize that another person may be grieving deeply, but have a different way of expressing it.

If you'd like to read more about grieving styles, Dr. Doka and Dr. Martin go into more detail in ***Grieving Beyond Gender: Understanding the Ways Men and Women Mourn***.

Online Support

For additional grief resources, please visit VNA's website at: vnatexas.org

Or scan QR code with your smartphone.

A QR reader can be installed from either Google or iTunes. Once installed simply scan the code and it will take you to the website.

VNA Grief Care Calendar for Summer 2024

Visiting Nurse Association Hospice is holding various grief support meetings. Some of our groups are in-person, and some on the Zoom platform. Our bereavement events are open to families and friends of VNA patients, as well as to adults from the community, and offered free of charge.

In-Person Grief Support

Grieving Well Workshop
Wednesday, July 24, 10 am to 12 noon, At VNA office, 1420 W. Mockingbird Ln. Suite 700, Dallas, TX 75247. **Contact Sue Rafferty, LMSW, rafferts@vnatexas.org, or call 972-215-6128, for more information and to register.**

Sharing the Journey: Coping with Grief
Five week grief support group, in person, 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. on Wednesdays, August 14 to September 11. At VNA office, 1420 W. Mockingbird Ln. Suite 700, Dallas, TX 75247. **Contact Sue Rafferty, LMSW, rafferts@vnatexas.org, or call 972-215-6128, for more information and to register.**

Online Grief Support (on Zoom)

Lunchtime Grief Support
Lunchtime grief support meetings provide an opportunity to hear a practical program about some aspect of the grief process, with time for questions and discussion.

Fourth Thursday of each month, noon to 1 pm, on Zoom: July 25, August 22, September 26, October 24; third Thursday in November and December. Through October: https://vnatexas.zoom.us/j/88060972096?pwd=ZEhtajhrbEtCSkpNRmdKajkyUXZ1QT09 Meeting ID: 880 6097 2096 Passcode: 887344 Phone 1-346-248-7799 Meeting ID: 880 6097 2096 Passcode: 887344. **For more information contact Sue Rafferty, LMSW, rafferts@vnatexas.org, 972-215-6128.**

Third Tuesday each month, noon to 1 pm on Zoom: starting September 17, October 15, November 19, December 17, January 21, and February 18.Zoom link is https://zoom.us/j/98952107582?pwd=AbpCIdU920dHKcaOeh1chm09GMxHlQ.1 Meeting ID: 989 5210 7582 Passcode: REc1eh. **For more information contact Elizabeth Barr, MA, MDiv, MT-BC elizabeth.barr@vnatexas.org, 214-616-1904**

Monthly Grief Support in partnership with Methodist Hospital "Generations.'
Meetings are held the second Monday each month, 1-2 pm, on Zoom, August 12, September 9, October 14, November 11. You will need to register with the Generations program to access the Zoom session. Zoom link: https://zoom.us/j/92980366396 Meeting ID is 929 8036 6396
Contact Sue Rafferty, LMSW, rafferts@vnatexas.org, or call 972-215-6128, for more information.

Please feel free to contact us for more information or for bereavement resources. There are other support groups we can recommend if our times do not work for you.

Grief Resources for Summer 2024

VNA bereavement events provide an opportunity for bereaved individuals to meet with others who understand loss and learn more about helping themselves. We are holding groups both in-person and on-line via Zoom.
Please reach out to your Bereavement Coordinator for more information or support.

Dallas and Kaufman: Sue Rafferty, LMSW – 972-215-6128 | rafferts@vnatexas.org
Collin and Denton: Elizabeth Barr, MA, MDiv, MT-BC – 214-616-1904 | elizabeth.barr@vnatexas.org
Pediatric: Kevin Moore, MDiv – 972-962-7500 | moorek@vnatexas.org

Helpful Websites for Loss and Grief

www.faithandgrief.org/gatherings – A local faith-based organization that is currently holding online and in person grief meetings.

www.griefshare.org – A faith-based grief program that uses video lessons and discussion groups. Many of its groups are being done online and in person; check their website to find ones near you.

www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/grief – Listing of private practice counselors and therapists in your area who specialize in grief and loss (VNA doesn't endorse these, but is only sharing this website info if it is helpful to you)

www.aftertalk.com – Website with articles, blog, resource center, and an "ask Dr. Robert Niemeyer" column, with space for writing private conversations to loved ones and archiving memories

www.centerforloss.com – Links to books and articles by grief counselor and educator Alan Wolfelt, PhD.

www.grief.com – Website with videos and info from grief expert and educator Dr. David Kessler.

www.thegrieftoolbox.com – A place for grief tools, where people can find the grief resources they need. Includes links to articles, videos, support group finder.

www.whatsyourgrief.com – Website about many aspects of coping with grief

www.widownet.org – Information and self-help resources for widows and widowers, discussion boards.

www.griefhealing.com – Website with extensive quotes/poems section, articles on loss and pet loss, discussion groups.

www.healgrief.org – Social support network providing resources and support for coping with grief.

www.opentohope.com – Online resource center that includes community forums and articles, podcasts, and videos on a wide variety of grief-related topics.

www.ourhouse-grief.org/grief-pages (has Spanish resources) – Grief articles in English and Spanish

www.connect.legacy.com – Online support groups, articles, blogs, resources, and more.

www.forums.grieving.com – Forums for different kinds of losses and grief issues.

www.hubpages.com/health/grief-loss-bereavement – Extensive website about grief and loss with many links to grief-related articles.

www.speakinggrief.org – Documentary about grief, webinars, stories, articles, and resources

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1420 W. Mockingbird Ln., Suite 700
Dallas, Texas 75247

vnatexas.org

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

Visiting Nurse Association Locations

VNA Headquarters & Dallas Branch
1420 W. Mockingbird Lane, Suite 700
Dallas, TX 75247
(214) 689-0000
Sue Rafferty (972) 215-6128
rafferts@**vna**texas.org
Counties Served: Dallas and Tarrant

Collin Branch
7290 Virginia Parkway, Suite 2300
McKinney, Texas 75071
(972) 562-0140
Elizabeth Barr (214) 616-1904
elizabeth.barr@**vna**texas.org
Counties Served: Collin, Fannin and Grayson

East Texas Branch
874 Ed Hall Drive, Suite 105
Kaufman, TX 75142
(972) 962-7500
Sue Rafferty (972) 215-6128
rafferts@**vna**texas.org
Counties Served: Ellis, Henderson, Hunt, Kaufman, Rockwall & Van Zandt with parts of Johnson and Navarro

VNA Ann's Haven
2800 Shoreline Dr., Suite 250
Denton, TX 76210
(940) 349-5900
Elizabeth Barr (214) 616-1904
elizabeth.barr@**vna**texas.org
Counties Served: Denton, Tarrant, Wise and parts of Cooke

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.