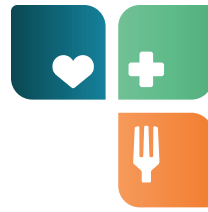


Sharing the Journey



Visiting Nurse Association

Meals on Wheels
Hospice & Palliative Care

A BEREAVEMENT PUBLICATION OF VNA HOSPICE CARE

Experiencing Grief

Laura Landreth, MA, Chaplain and Bereavement Coordinator, VNA Denton

The most common reaction to the news of the death of a loved one (even if the death has been anticipated for some time or you actually witnessed the death) is disbelief. The inability to believe that someone you care so much about and who plays such a vital part in your life is now lost to you, is somehow just too much to take in and initially accept as true.

This initial numbness and inability to accept the loss slowly wears off as your head's no longer able to deny the truth that your heart knows. This period of initial loss acceptance varies widely according to the person and the type of loss they have suffered.

Not surprisingly, while your head may be denying the reality of the death, your heart may be suddenly and immediately overwhelmed with emotion, struck with the enormity of the loss. As a result, you can find yourself completely distraught and expressing the most intense emotions.

This disconnect between the head's ability to accept the reality and the heart's sorrow can sometimes survive even past your loved one's funeral. This disconnect will, slowly but surely, begin to lessen and fade in time as the reality of the loss becomes increasingly real.

When you first start grieving a profound loss, about the only thing you can focus on is the loss itself, and the only thing you can do about it is try to hang on and survive. Because you have just received a major blow to your

soul, it is not surprising that you have moments of thinking you are going crazy. The most you can do during these moments is to concentrate your energy on taking care of yourself both physically and emotionally. Always remember the instructions given from airline flight attendants, "Put your oxygen mask on

yourself first, before attempting to assist others in putting on theirs."

When attempting to take care of yourself in this survival mode, you may have to deal with periods of extreme emotional turmoil as well as bouts of emotional deadness and depression. You may have trouble sleeping and eating along with concentrating and remembering things. You may feel as though you are surely going crazy. That is one of the most common worries voiced by those suffering acute grief as well as one of the most unfounded.

These "crazy" feelings of grief are actually a sane response to the loss you are experiencing. The following examples are all symptoms of normal grief:



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.

SPRING 2022

Experiencing Grief (cont.)

Laura Landreth, MA, Chaplain and Bereavement Coordinator, VNA Denton

- Distorted thinking patterns, “crazy” and/or irrational thoughts, fearful thoughts
- Feelings of despair and hopelessness
- Out of control or numbed emotions
- Changes in sensory perceptions (sight, taste, smell, etc.)
- Increased irritability
- May want to talk a lot or not at all
- Memory lags and mental “short-circuits”
- Inability to concentrate
- Obsessive focus on the loved one
- Losing track of time
- Increase or decrease of appetite and/or sexual desire
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Dreams in which the deceased seems to visit the griever
- Nightmares in which the death themes are repeated
- Physical illness like the flu, headaches, or other maladies
- Shattered beliefs about life, the world, and even God

It is at times like this that you need to take each day one day at a time and break it down into smaller parts so that you feel capable of dealing with the moment. It is also a good reminder to breathe during these times. Breathing exercises are one of the most helpful

things you can do when you are grieving or stressed. Increasing the amount of oxygen in the body can improve your immunity (which is probably low right now), calms down anxiety, increases sleep quality, and can improve your concentration and cognitive properties, among other beneficial qualities.

Other suggestions for surviving the grip of your emotions:

Do not fight them. You may feel as though



once you start expressing an emotion, you will never be able to stop. At some point in the emotional purge, after exhaustion sets in, you will run out of tears, cries, screams, wails, and everything else and then just as suddenly as the onslaught began, it will end.

Get to a safe place. To deal with these emotional onslaughts, it is critical that you be in a safe place at the time they come over you. If you are driving down the highway, pull over as soon as you can and get off the road. If you need to rage without alarming others around you, try to maintain your cool until you can go somewhere alone.

Get some rest. Nights are hard and you may be having a tough time falling asleep. Particularly after times of emotional onslaughts, you will feel even more drained. This is a perfect time to take a break from grieving and set about restoring yourself both physically and emotionally. Getting some physical exercise can help you rest and calm the troubled mind. If you can manage it, take a short nap. Or at the minimum, give yourself

The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing . . . not healing, not curing . . . that is a friend who cares.

– Henry Nouwen

Experiencing Grief *(cont.)*

Laura Landreth, MA, Chaplain and Bereavement Coordinator, VNA Denton

a few minutes of quiet time before trying to undertake anything else.

Eat right. To avoid getting ill while you are grieving and to maintain the strength you need to get through the ups and downs, you may need to make eating regularly a priority. It is a choice to resist the urge to ignore food even if you do not have an appetite, are not able to eat much at any sitting, and do not enjoy the taste of food. These are all common symptoms of grieving. On the other hand, some may find themselves reaching for comfort foods which may be high in sugar and carbohydrates. These items can further depress your mood as well as interrupt your sleep. Regulate your sugar intake carefully and make it a point to eat healthy meals.

Reach out when you are ready. Although grieving is something that you can only do for yourself, you do not have to go through the process alone. Only you can be the judge of when you really need time to yourself and when you need to share your feelings with someone. It is quite natural to feel more alone than ever before. These feelings of being isolated and alone can add to your burden of grieving. During this grieving period, know you can reach out to people. Let others support you, listen to you, or just be there with you.

Grief will take longer than you have ever imagined. The danger here is that you run the risk of making your grieving process a great deal more complex and difficult than it needs to be. Grieving naturally tends to intensify at three months, special dates and the one-year anniversary. If you find yourself having trouble getting beyond feelings of anger and regret regarding the loss or finding it difficult to express feelings of appreciation for the person you lost, or the relationship you shared with them, these may be signs that it is time to seek out others who can support you. Grief is a journey; a process and you do not have to travel alone.

**As you journey through all the seasons of your grieving, you will discover what countless others have discovered before you:
that you have changed.**

**You will never again be the person you once were.
You will have lost,
but in addition to the losing,
because of the losing,
you will have gained.**

**You will be yourself,
and you will be
more than yourself.
Some people describe this process
as transformation.
Others call it resurrection.**

**Whatever words you choose,
the result is the same.**

Something new will have happened.

Something original will have come to life.

Something unexpected will have been born.

*James E. Miller, Winter Grief, Summer Grace:
Returning to Life after a Loved One Dies.*

GRIEF RESOURCES

*Understanding Your Grief:
Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding
Hope and Healing Your Heart*
by Wolfelt, Alan, Ph. D.
ISBN: 978-1-879651-35-7

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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 (214) 689-2922
rafferts@vnatexas.org

Counties Served: Dallas and Tarrant

Collin Branch

7290 Virginia Parkway, Suite 2300
McKinney, Texas 75071
(972) 562-0140

Susan Bryan (972) 562-0140
bryans@vnatexas.org

Counties Served: Collin, Fannin and Grayson

East Texas Branch

874 Ed Hall Drive, Suite 105
Kaufman, TX 75142
(972) 962-7500

Kevin Moore (972) 962-7500
moorek@vnatexas.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

Laura Landreth (469) 594-0939
laura.landreth@vnatexas.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.

VNA Grief Care Calendar for Spring 2022

Visiting Nurse Association Hospice is holding various grief support meetings. **All groups are on the Zoom online platform currently.** We offer monthly meetings, occasional workshops, and the 4-6 week support group Sharing the Journey: Coping with Grief. Our bereavement events are open to families and friends of VNA patients, as well as adults from the community. If you know of others who are grieving the loss of a loved one, you are welcome to invite them to join us.

Dallas County

Lunchtime Grief Support

Thursday, April 28, May 26, and June 23

Held on Zoom, Noon to 1 p.m.

Zoom link will be sent out before the meeting.

Sharing the Journey: Coping With Grief

6 Week group

Wednesdays, Starting June 8 to July 13

Held on Zoom, 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Monthly Grief Support in partnership with Methodist Hospital "Generations."

2nd Mondays, May 9, June 13, and July 11

Held on Zoom, 1:00 p.m. to 2 p.m.

You may need to register with the Generations program when you access the Zoom session.

Contact Sue Rafferty to RSVP and sign up at (972) 215-6128 or rafferts@vnatexas.org

Denton County

No events planned at this time. Please see information about Zoom grief groups being held in Dallas and Collin that you are welcome to attend.

Contact Laura Landreth for information in the Denton area at (469) 594-0939 or laura.landreth@vnatexas.org

Collin County

Grieving Hearts Group (loss of spouse)

2nd Tuesdays, next meeting May 17

Held on Zoom, 10:00 a.m. to 11:15 a.m.

Sign ups for new participants are due by 3 p.m. the day before

Zoom link will be sent out before the meeting.

Grieving Together Group (loss of any loved ones)

4th Tuesdays, April 26, and May 24

Held on Zoom, 10:00 a.m. to 11:15 a.m.

Sign ups for new participants are due by 3 p.m. the day before

Zoom link will be sent out before the meeting.

Contact Susan Bryan to RSVP and sign up, (214) 733-5543 or bryans@vnatexas.org

Kaufman County

No events planned at this time. Please see information about Zoom grief groups being held in Dallas and Collin that you are welcome to attend.

Contact Kevin Moore for information in the Kaufman area (972) 962-7500 or moorek@vnatexas.org

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

Grief Resources for Spring 2022

VNA bereavement events provide an opportunity for bereaved individuals to meet with others who understand loss and learn more about helping themselves. We will resume our in-person grief events when our medical staff deems it safe to do so. We are holding some on-line Zoom Grief Groups. **Please reach out to your Bereavement Coordinator for more information or support.**

Dallas: Sue Rafferty – 214-689-2922 | rafferts@vnatexas.org

Collin: Susan Bryan – 214-733-5543 | bryans@vnatexas.org

Denton: Laura Landreth – 469-594-0939 | laura.landreth@vnatexas.org

Kaufman: Kevin Moore – 972-962-7500 | moorek@vnatexas.org

Online Grief Support Groups

www.faithandgrief.org/gatherings – A local faith-based organization that is currently holding online 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; check their website to find ones near you.

<https://www.thewidowsjourney.org/> – Dallas organization for widows that holds support meetings online.

Helpful Websites for Loss and Grief

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.