Sad Isn’t Bad: Experiencing the Emotions of Grief

“The experience of grief challenges our deepest sense of who we are. Without help and wisdom, we can find ourselves severely and chronically disrupted by the reactions of fear, anger, and isolation arising from grief. Our sense of connection with life itself can seem to disappear.

Yet, though overwhelmed by the great upset of grief, we have a choice about how to respond. We can turn away from our own deep pain, seeking relief from distraction, numbing, and denial. Or we can turn toward the pain with compassionate attention and a willingness to allow what we are feeling to be just as it is.” Jeffrey Brantley, M.D. Forward to Grieving Mindfully.

You probably read my title and thought to yourself, “What? Sad isn’t bad? Who is she kidding? Sad is most definitely BAD!” That’s what we believe. Have you been told to “get over it,” “cheer up,” or “stay strong”? Friends and family members mean well and are trying to be helpful, but the underlying message is, “it’s not okay to feel what’s in your heart.”

At any given time, you might feel waves of sadness, guilt, anxiety, loneliness, pain, anger, and helplessness. All of these are normal responses to loss. The feelings might come over you all of a sudden and surprise you. There might be certain times during the day that feel more emotional. Although you might be tempted to push those feelings away, I would encourage you to open up to them. This is not always possible, I know, but when you can, let them flow. They are an important part of your grieving process. They are your unique response to the loss you have endured.

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Grief and Loss Support Group

This is a 6 week support group for adults grieving the loss of someone significant in their lives. Our support group provides an opportunity to come together with others who have experienced the loss of a loved one to share stories, offer and receive support, and find hope and healing. A group can offer both peer support and education and information about the grief journey. It is important that participants are able to attend all 6 weeks. **Registration for the group is required.** There are no drop-ins permitted. Please note that the group is subject to be canceled if sufficient registration is not reached. Space is limited. Please call for more information.

**Quakertown Area**
April 1 – May 6, 2015 from 3 – 4:30pm.
St. Luke’s Quakertown Hospital (Cafeteria Conference Room), 1021 Park Ave, Quakertown.
Call Christine at (610) 997-7132 to register for this group.

**Service of Remembrance**

We gather periodically as family members of our patients and as a Hospice staff to remember those who have died. Our Services of Remembrance are inter-faith and are offered as a way in which we may take time to reflect, remember, and celebrate the lives and the legacies of those who have passed from ours. The names of the deceased will be read at these services unless we are notified that you prefer otherwise. Please bring your family and friends and join us for this time of remembrance.

_for patients served by our Bethlehem office and Hospice House and who died between November 1, 2014 and February 28, 2015_, the Service of Remembrance will be held on **Sunday, April 12, 2015**, at 3pm at Wesley Methodist Church, 2540 Center St. in Bethlehem.

**The Emotions of Grief** (continued from page 1)

Author Ashley Davis Bush, LCSW, writes in her book *Transcending Loss* that “grief is not an illness. These feelings are the mind, body, and spirit’s natural reaction to being robbed, to having one’s heart ripped apart and one’s world blown wide open. Although processing these feelings is extremely difficult, it is the only road for true healing.” She suggests going “straight through the heart of grief by identifying it, feeling it, absorbing it, and expressing it.”

So how do you go straight to the heart of grief? You can start by talking. Tell the story. Tell it again. Talk about your loved one and talk about your feelings with someone who understands grief. Express yourself through writing, painting, singing, or other creative outlets. Create rituals that help you move through a specific emotion, such as an act that focuses on forgiveness when you are feeling guilt. Spend time alone where you can allow the waves of emotion to crash over you. Draw support from your faith or religious community. Finally, take a break from the intensity of your emotions. Take a morning walk or watch a funny movie. Above all, be loving and gentle with yourself. Honor yourself by experiencing and expressing your emotions.

With compassionate support,

Christine
Book Notes

*Stitches: A Handbook on Meaning, Hope, and Repair*
Anne Lamott

“What if the great insider-trading truth is that you don’t even get over the biggest losses in your life? Is that the good news, the bad news, or both? The good news is that if you don’t seal up your heart with caulking compound, and instead stay permeable, people stay alive inside you, and maybe outside your, too, forever.”

“This is also the bad news, not because your heart will continue to hurt forever, but because grief is so frowned upon, so hard for even intimate bystanders to witness, that you will think you must be crazy for not getting over it. You think it’s best to keep this secret, even if it cuts you off from certain aspects of life, like, say, the truth of your heart, and all that is real.

The pain does grow less acute, but the insidious palace lie that we will get over crushing losses means that our emotional GPS can never find true north, as it is based on maps that no longer mention the most important places we have been to.

Pretending that things are nicely boxed up and put away robs us of great riches.”

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**Prayer of Faith**
Author Unknown

We trust that beyond absence there is presence. That beyond the pain there can be healing. That beyond the brokenness there can be wholeness. That beyond anger there may be peace. That beyond hurting there may be forgiveness. That beyond the silence there may be the word. That beyond the word there may be understanding. That through understanding there is love.

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**Understanding Your Grief**
Alan Wolfelt

“Sadness and Depression”

Sadness can be the most hurtful feeling on your journey through grief. We don’t want to be sad. Sadness saps pleasure from our lives. Sadness makes us feel crummy. But sadness is a natural, authentic emotion after the death of someone loved. Something precious in your life is now gone. Of course you are sad. Of course you feel deep sorrow. Allowing yourself to feel your sadness is in large part what your journey toward healing is all about. I suggest you say out loud right now, “I have every right to feel sad!”

Weeks, or often months, will pass before you are fully confronted by the depth of your sorrow. The slow-growing nature of this awareness is good. You could not and should not try to tolerate all of your sadness at once. Your body, mind, and spirit need time to work together to embrace the depth of your loss. Be patient with yourself. Surround yourself with loving people who will understand you, not judge you.

Paradoxically, the only way to lesson your pain is to move toward it, not away from it. Moving toward your sadness is not easy to do.

Keep talking until you have exhausted your capacity to talk. Doing so will help reconnect you with the world outside of yourself. Or if you can’t talk it out, write it out! Paint it out! Sing it out! But get the feelings outside of yourself. And give yourself permission to cry – as often and as much as you need to. Tears can help you cleanse your body, mind, and spirit.
Resources for Children

_Sad Isn’t Bad: A Good Grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing with Loss_  
Written by Michaele Mundy and Illustrated by R.W. Alley

“It’s Okay to Cry
When someone you care about dies, it’s very sad.  
There will be tears, but tears can be good. Sad isn’t bad.  
You might feel like you are too big to cry. You’re not.  
You might even notice yourself crying at things that didn’t use to bother you –  
a shoe that won’t tie, a toy that breaks, homework that seems too hard.  
Talk to someone you trust about these feelings. Tell yourself it’s okay to cry  
when you’re sad. You have a good reason.”

“It’s Good to Share Your Feelings
When you lose someone close, you might feel sad, mad, scared, or lonely.  
If you try to hold these feelings inside, it can make you feel even worse.  
Talk about how you are feeling right now with someone who cares about you.  
Sometimes people get stomach aches or headaches when they’re really sad. After all, you feel sad all over –  
in your mind and your body. When you’re alone, you may think more about what upsets you. You might have  
trouble going to sleep at night. Read a favorite story or ask someone to snuggle in and read to you.”

The Dougy Center  
The National Center for Grieving Children and Families  
http://www.dougy.org/

The Dougy Center provides support in a safe place where children, teens, young adults, and their families  
grieving a death can share their experiences. The website offers resources and activities for all ages.

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Community Services

_Stepping Stones for Children_
This group, offered by the Lehigh Valley Health Network’s Grief Support Services, is a  
combination of education, activities, and support designed to help children ages 4 – 15 facilitate  
healthy grieving. Call (610) 969-0330 for scheduled meeting dates.

_Camp Erin - Philadelphia_
This is a weekend camp for grieving children and teens (ages 6 – 17) held in Montgomery County,  
PA from May 15 – 17, 2015. The camp, a partnership between The Moyer Foundation and Penn  
Wissahickon Hospice, combines traditional camp activities with grief education and support.  
Applications are accepted until all spaces are filled; it is recommended that families apply by March  
1st. To obtain an application visit the website at [www.pennmedicine.org/camperin](http://www.pennmedicine.org/camperin), e-mail  
CampErinPhila@uphs.upenn.edu, or call 1-800-700-8807.
Adult Bereavement Services in the Community

This is a listing of additional bereavement resources in the area. If you have a need for something and don’t see it on this list, please call Christine at (610) 997-7132 for referrals to other services.

GriefShare Groups are a faith-based, evangelical approach to grief and loss. GriefShare groups are provided at various locations around the Lehigh Valley. To find a location near you, please visit www.griefshare.org.

Free Spirits is a group of more than 2 dozen older widows who go out to lunch once a month to keep active and offer support to each other—and to newer widows. Most are members of Church of the Manger UCC, Bethlehem. Call 610-866-8223 for more information.

VNA/Hospice of Monroe County offers a support group the 1st and 3rd Wednesday each month at noon. Call 570-421-5390 for more information.

Lehigh Valley Health Network offers grief support services in the form of counseling, support groups, and workshops for adults, as well as a lunch club for women. For more information, please call 610-969-0330.

Grand View Hospital Hospice offers many groups and services that change seasonally. Please call 215-453-4210 for more information.

Gentle Yoga for Grief, Stress, and Life Transitions and Grief Education and Counseling Groups offered by Wendy Littner Thomson M.Ed., LPC, RYT. For locations, times, or more information please call 610-730-1992 or visit www.givinggriefavoice.com.

The Compassionate Friends offers ongoing support groups for parents, grandparents, and adult siblings grieving the loss of a child, grandchild, or sibling. To find a local chapter, visit the organization’s website at www.compassionatefriends.org and click on “Chapter Locator.”

Family Answers holds a Survivors of Suicide support group at 402 North Fulton Street in Allentown, PA. This group is held the first and third Monday each month from 7-8pm. Call (610) 435-9651 for more information.

Cancer Support Community of Lehigh Valley with St. Luke’s offers the Hope and Healing Series. Call 610-861-7555 or email info@cancersupportglv.org for more information.

Thank you!

We’d like to take this opportunity to extend our gratitude to all of you who have made donations from your heart as a way of expressing your appreciation for our hospice bereavement services. It is an honor to companion you on your grief and life transition journeys. Your gifts ensure that this service continues to evolve in meaningful directions to meet the ongoing and growing needs of our families and our community. Many of you ask for a telephone number for donation information.

You may contact the Development Office at 484-526-3067.

Again, heartfelt thanks.

Become Part of a Dedicated Team

St. Luke’s Hospice is actively seeking volunteers to serve and support hospice patients and families within the Lehigh Valley and Carbon county areas. Specially trained volunteers are an integral part of the St. Luke’s Hospice team.

Volunteers serve as a welcome friend to the family. They share their time and talents in many ways. Volunteers can visit with patients in their homes or in St. Luke’s inpatient Hospice House. They can also assist with administrative office duties and help at special events.

For more information or to join our next volunteer training session in Spring 2015, please call 610-997-7121.

*Applicants who have recently experienced the loss of a family member are asked to wait until they have completed a bereavement period of at least one year before applying to become a hospice volunteer.
THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ILLNESS AND THE ART OF HEALING

Wednesday, April 22, 2015
7:30 pm
Doors open at 6:30 pm
Central Moravian Church
West Church & Main Streets
Bethlehem, PA

Join us for a motivational evening featuring internationally renowned speaker and author Dr. Bernie Siegel, who changed mainstream thinking with his 1978 book, Love, Medicine and Miracles. The book explores the powerful role the mind can play in fighting illness. Dr. Siegel's writings continue to spark discussions about patient empowerment and the choice to live fully and die in peace. His philosophy continues to break new ground in the field of healing and living the message of kindness and love.

Motivational, inspirational and down-to-earth, Dr. Siegel's approach is one of compassion, caring and love coupled with a wonderful sense of humor. His message of hope and love is extended to all who seek a whole person approach for living life fully each day.

General Admission tickets: $10/person
For more information or to purchase tickets:
1-866-STLUKES (785-8537) or www.sluhn.org/littnerlectureseries

Presented by Friends of Hospice

Wendy Littner Thomson Counseling Services, LLC