Suddenly the man blurted out what was tearing him up inside. “I’m so angry!” he told me. “Why did she have to die and leave me with four kids to raise?”

Anger can be one of the strongest and most disturbing emotions we encounter after the death of a loved one. Many of us have been conditioned to either suppress anger or think it’s unhealthy to feel it, much less to vent it. Yet depending on the unique circumstances of our loss, anger is an unsettling emotion that can easily consume us.

According to renowned clinical psychologist Therese Rando, anger is a natural response to being deprived of something desired. It’s a protest. It’s an emotion that’s hardwired into the human psyche. Watch what happens when an infant is feeding from a bottle and this bottle is suddenly snatched away. What do you hear? You hear protest in the form of crying and screaming.

While it’s normal to feel anger in response to loss, it’s important to prevent anger from developing into something more serious such as clinical depression, complicated grief or even the kind of self-loathing that leads to low self-esteem and thoughts of suicide. First, know that it’s OK to be angry, but it’s what you do with your anger that matters most. That means it’s not OK to hurt others or yourself when you’re angry. And second, anger becomes unhealthy when it begins to spill into other parts of your life. Flipping out at other drivers in a traffic jam or raging at the customer who has more than 10 items in the grocery store express lane may be an indication that your anger needs to be addressed.

It’s essential that we deal with this uncomfortable emotion. If we don’t allow ourselves the opportunity to express a natural response as well as natural outlets for this emotion, the anger will build. Slowly we will fill up like a clogged kitchen sink until capacity is reached and the anger spills out into our life. Unexpressed anger doesn’t dissipate. It merely hides and reemerges in another form. And if we try to suppress it, we may turn to excessive drinking, smoking and other forms of risky behavior.

While it’s uncomfortable acknowledging anger, suppressing or swallowing feelings will delay our ability to cope and progress through grief. Voicing feelings and expressing anger as well as other emotions can be not only empowering, it will help us eventually heal. Turn to page 2 to learn about some healthy ways to express anger.

Jean
Healthy Ways to Express Anger

In grief, experiencing explosive emotions such as anger and resentment are normal. Beneath these emotions are usually feelings of helplessness, frustration and hurt. There are two avenues for dealing with anger—outward or inward. The outward avenue leads to healing; the inward avenue does not.

Intense feelings need to be expressed, not denied. Being able to say “I’m angry!” may be all it takes to dispel the emotion. Or you may need to express aloud all the stories and feelings that follow that statement before the anger can dissipates. Here are a few safe ways to express anger:

► Take a walk or a run, the longer and faster, the better.
► Try sporting activities such as racquet sports, martial arts or kickboxing.
► Punch a pillow or hammer nails into a piece of wood.
► Engage in physical chores such as chopping wood or scrubbing floors.
► Yell in the privacy of your home or outdoors.
► Have a good cry. Encourage the tears by looking at photos or listening to certain music.
► Write about your anger. Put your thoughts and feelings on paper. Write a letter to the deceased.

And finally, turn to a nonjudgmental listener, someone you trust who will allow you to openly express yourself. Naming your feelings and acknowledging them are the first steps to dealing with them. It’s actually the process of becoming friendly with your feelings that helps you begin to heal them.

Do Nice People Get Angry?

Following the death of someone we loved, anger can erupt out of nowhere. Some targets of our anger may include:

► Anyone associated with the death of your loved one. This can be anyone from the hospice nurse or oncologist to the funeral home director or the hospital administrator.

► God. How could He allow this horrible thing to happen and what did I do to deserve this loss?

► People who don’t support us. Neighbors and friends who ignored or abandoned you during your time of loss. Others include people who just want you to be “over it” and return to your old self.

► Self – How did I not realize he or she was so ill? How could I not have seen this coming? This form of self-loathing can lead to depression, complicated grief and repeated thoughts of suicide.

► The person who died. Aghast or ashamed at the idea of blaming the person who died, grievers often stuff or deny these feelings. Maybe you’re angry because you had begged your loved one to stop smoking. Maybe you had urged them to go for a colonoscopy or mammogram. Or maybe you feel abandoned and lost after their death.

► Family or friends who are not “grieving right.” You mourn the death of your mother and your sister hasn’t even shed a tear. Different people grieve different relationships.

► Innocent people often become the target of our anger, such as the wife who’s complaining about her husband and you just lost yours. “Intact” families who haven’t experienced the death of a loved one are particularly susceptible to our ire.
Newly Bereaved Workshops

Grief can be messy and unpredictable and sometimes we need affirmation that we aren’t going crazy. That’s why we offer the Newly Bereaved Workshop. It’s designed to help participants understand the emotional, physical, social and spiritual impact of loss on us.

The Newly Bereaved Workshops are designed for people who have experienced a recent death of a loved one. Each session helps participants learn about grief reactions and coping strategies while honoring the uniqueness of their grief journey. Preregistration required. To register for one of the following workshops, call (484) 526-2499:

**Tuesday, September 25 from 6-8 pm** at St. Luke’s Allentown Campus, 1736 Hamilton Street, Allentown, 18104 in the Wieand conference room on the 3rd floor of the east wing.

**Wednesday, October 17 from 6-8 pm** at St. Luke’s Hospital-Anderson Campus, 1700 St. Luke’s Blvd., Easton, 18045 in the lower level conference room B.

Open/Drop-in Groups

Open/Drop-In Support Groups are designed to offer continued support to the bereaved who have already attended grief and loss programs through St. Luke’s Hospice. Open/Drop-In Groups enable participants the chance to receive and provide support in a collaborative environment. These groups are facilitated by a bereavement counselor but are directed by group members in terms of content and discussion. Currently we offer groups at the following locations:

**Easton:** **First Monday of every month from 4-5 pm** at St. Luke’s Hospital-Anderson Campus, Medical Office Building, 1700 St. Luke’s Blvd, Easton, 18045 in the lower level conference room A.

**Quakertown:** **Second Monday of every month from 6-7 pm** at St. Luke’s Hospital-Quakertown Campus, 1021 Park Avenue, Quakertown, 18951 in the cafeteria conference room.

Resources

Don’t tell me that you understand,
Don’t tell me that you know.
Don’t tell me that I will survive,
How I will surely grow.
Don’t tell me this is just a test,
That I am truly blessed,
That I am chosen for this task,
Apart from all the rest.
Don’t come at me with answers
That can only come from me,
Don’t tell me how my grief will pass
That I will soon be free.

Don’t stand in pious judgment
Of the bonds I must untie.
Don’t tell me how to suffer
And don’t tell me how to cry,
My life is filled with selfishness,
My pain is all I see,
But I need you and I need your love
Unconditionally.
Accept me in my ups and downs,
I need someone to share
Just hold my hand and let me cry
And say, “My friend, I care.”

- Joanetta Hendel
Additional Places to Find Support and to Share Your Story

This is a list of free bereavement services in the area. Please call the bereavement office at 484-526-2499 if you are in need of something more or for referrals to other services.

Adult Support Information

Bradbury Sullivan LGBT Community Center – The center offers a professionally led monthly bereavement support group for LGBT people who have experienced loss. The group meets on the 4th Wednesday of each month from 5:30-7:00 pm. Please register with Ariel@bradburysullivancenter.org.

Doylestown Hospital Hospice offers a variety of support groups. Visit www.dhospice.com or call 215-345-2079.

Gentle Yoga for Grief, Stress and Life Transitions is offered by Wendy Littner Thompson, M.Ed., LPC, RYT. Please contact her at 610-730-1992 or visit her website at www.givinggriefavoice.com to learn more. Let her know if your loved one was a St. Luke’s Hospice patient.

Grief Share is a faith-based grief support group program. Several locations are provided within the Lehigh Valley. Visit www.griefshare.org to find a location near you.

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

GRASP is for families whom have experienced death due to substance abuse. The support group meets at the 1st Presbyterian Church in Allentown, room 118 on the first Monday of the month at 12 noon. Please register with Jenny Kemps at 610-422-8490 or email jenkemps@ptd.net. A second group meets on the third Monday of the month from 7-8:30 pm. Please register with Nancy Howe at 484-788-9440 or email nancyhowe@ymail.com.

Healing Hearts Loss, Grief and Bereavement Center in Emmaus is offering two 6-week survivors of suicide loss support groups, one for adults and one for teens beginning Wednesday, September 5, 2018 from 6-7 pm. Please call 610-421-8625 to register. Suggested $10 donation.

HALOS – CLC (Hope After a Loved One’s Suicide – Child Loss Chapter) is for parents, grandparents and adult siblings who have experienced loss of a child or sibling to suicide. The group meets on the 4th Thursday of the month from 6:30–8:30 pm at Hughes Library in Stroudsburg, PA. Call to register with Alice Keyes at 570-236-1168 or email alicekeys00@gmail.com.

Healing Hearts Loss, Grief and Bereavement Center in Emmaus is offering two 6-week survivors of suicide loss support groups, one for adults and one for teens beginning Wednesday, September 5, 2018 from 6-7 pm. Please call 610-421-8625 to register. Suggested $10 donation.

VNA Hospice of Monroe County provides an adult support group to anyone who has experienced the death of a loved one within the past year. These groups are held on the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month from 12:00 noon—1:30 pm at 502 VNA Road, Route 447, East Stroudsburg, PA 18301. Please call 570-421-5390 to learn more.

Pocono VNA offers a support group for those who have experienced the death of a loved one within the past 12 months. These groups are held on 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of the month at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Fish Hill Rd., Tannersville, PA 18372. The group begins at 7:00 pm. Call 570-629-1992 for more information.

Support Information for Children

Lehigh Valley Health Network offers “Stepping Stones for Children” for ages 6 through 17. This is a combination of education, activities and support to help facilitate healthy grieving with others who are the same age. Please call 610-402-7481 to register. The group meets at 2024 Lehigh Street, Allentown, PA 18103.

Support Information in New Jersey

Karen Ann Quinlan Hospice 800-882-1117 www.karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement