

## BLESSED SACRAMENT CATHOLIC CHURCH

### GRIEF SUPPORT NEWSLETTER 2

Welcome to the second in our series of the Blessed sacrament Grief Support newsletters. As a reminder, even though you may be reading these newsletters, you are still able to take part in any of our grief support services such as check-in calls, brief one-to-one support meetings or group grief support meetings. You are also encouraged to participate in any church religious or social activities when able.

As we mentioned in our first newsletter, each individual's healing journey is unique and personal to them. This means that no two people will necessarily benefit in the same way and at the same time, even if the process and presentation of grief support information is identical for all.

There is no handbook for grief. The best thing you can do for yourself is to acknowledge your feelings and, when the time is right, create space and practices that give you an opportunity to heal from the pain of the loss. If you are honoring the pain, you are moving forward even if it doesn't feel that way just yet.

If you wish to participate in any of our grief support activities such as phone calls or a support group, please contact the church office at **321 632 6333**.

### COMMON GRIEF SUPPORT MISCONCEPTIONS

Many people have been taught throughout their lives to face a crisis with a “stiff upper lip” or to “bear up and be strong”. As we are influenced by these messages, we may become fearful that any show of emotion, particularly tears, might be interpreted by others as a sign of weakness (e.g., “He’s falling apart” or “She's going to pieces”).

One of the sad things about this is that many bereaved and their family members or friends experience their grief alone, feeling “There must be something wrong with me. Certainly no one I know ever felt or behaved in these strange ways”. Fearing embarrassment or being seen as “crazy” by others, many bereaved persons hide their true feelings of grief. But do not worry, what you are feeling is a normal, natural and expected response to the loss of something significant in your life – your loved one.

Always remember that this journey will take as much time and effort as YOU need to give it to get to a better place for you. Don't judge yourself by the words of others about where you should be in the grief process, but on how you, yourself, feel at any time on any day. Some days will seem very good, and you will feel excitement that you may be moving on. Only to be followed the next day by feeling you are just at the beginning of a long tunnel. THAT IS NORMAL and trust me, you *will* reach a day when you suddenly realize you have been better for more than a day at a time.



## COMMON GRIEF REACTIONS

Your grief reaction may manifest itself in any one of the following ways or in a way unique to you:

### Physical

**I feel sick to my stomach. I just can't eat.**

**I have trouble getting to sleep and after I finally do, I only sleep for a few hours when I am up again.**

**My doctor says there is nothing physically wrong, but I still don't feel like my old self.**

Physical reactions may include weakness, pounding and/or a heavy feeling in the chest or shortness of breath, among others. Make sure you report all major physical changes to your doctor. It is quite common to experience a major health crisis in the first year after losing a loved one due to the stress grief places on the body. A visit to your doctor may prevent this happening.

### Social

**I thought this would bring the family closer, but instead we are constantly bickering.**

**When I feeling up, others make me feel depressed or dependent on them.**

**When I'm feel good, it feels wrong.**

Social reactions may include unexpectedly responding to others with anger or irritability and loss spontaneity. In regard to families, try be kind to one another and recognize that not everyone expresses grief in the same way or has the same needs. As best you can, try to communicate your desires to your loved ones in a kind way and accept what they tell you about their needs. Try to accept how you feel each day and do the best you can, as you can.

### Mental and Emotional

**I can't seem to get organized. I am up and down a hundred times a day and then never accomplish anything.**

**I keep thinking about how it all happened over and over again in my mind. I guess I am trying to make sense of it all.**

Mental manifestations may include lack of initiative, forgetfulness and anxiety. Emotional reactions may include feelings of relief, anguish, depression and/or unexpected and uncontrolled crying. "I must be crazy" is a common thought.

### Spiritual

**If my faith were stronger, I would be able to handle this.**

**Why won't God help me now when I need Him?**

**If I really believed, he/she would have lived.**

While religious and spiritual beliefs are often a source of comfort in times of grief, most people have some lingering thoughts or doubts about their beliefs and those of their deceased loved one. This does not make you any less of a believer but just means you are normal and, for your own peace of mind, may need to explore what it is you believe. You may see with new eyes what your religion or spirituality teaches about death and loss now that you have experienced them to such a personal degree.

## FINDING HEALING IN YOUR DAILY LIFE

In the first few weeks after a loss, it is very normal for people to put a pause on their usual habits and activities. However, around 2-3 months after the loss it may be time to start thinking about what activities can be added back into your life that will nourish you physically, mentally and spiritually. You may wish to take up again a hobby you once enjoyed but a new activity can be just as helpful. The following activities have been reported as helpful by others.

**Go for a walk      Love on your pet      Do breathing exercises for calmness**

**Talk to someone who uplifts you      Spend time with someone you haven't seen in a while**

**Think of a goal that will bring you joy      Listen to your favorite music      Get a massage**

**Plan a surprise for someone      Do something creative      Take a shower or warm bath**

**Travel somewhere you've longed to go      Learn something new      Make that 'bucket' list**

**Read a good book or watch a good movie      Invite a friend or neighbor to lunch**

**Send a note to someone you keep meaning to contact again**

**Plant a tree or a flower in honor of your loved one**

**Tell your children / grandchildren something they would be surprised to know about you**

**Say your loved one's name out loud and thank them for the good times you remember**

## WHAT GRIEF CAN LOOK LIKE AROUND THIS TIME

A sense of “this is reality”. In the first few weeks after the death of a close loved one most people still feel that their loved one could walk through the door or call anytime. This tends to go away after the first month or two and new aspects of grief appear. This is usually the time when we begin to mourn not only the person who died but the hopes and dreams held for and with that person. You may begin to realize many of the things that your loved one did previously that you never had to think about. This can be so hard to go through and it is important to remember to be kind to yourself and look for the people in your life who can help you in this time of adjustment.

You may be faced with some big decisions such as should you move or sell the house, when should you go through your loved one's belongings, and what should you do with them? You've probably heard not to make any major decisions in the first year after the death, but this is not appropriate or possible for all people. A better guideline is if you feel a burning desire to make a big change, sit on it for a few weeks if you can. After that, you can revisit the idea and see if you still want to do it. Your needs can be very different from others, so you just want to avoid making significant decisions on a whim.

## CONNECTING WITH OTHERS THROUGH GRIEF SUPPORT

Many people have mixed feelings about talking to others about their grief, individually or in a group. We understand and perhaps it will help if you let me share another survivor's story with you.

*“I found my husband dead of a heart attack on a Monday morning. Only someone who has gone through an ordeal like this can understand the incredible pain. The despair of the first weeks seemed never-ending. The sadness, the loneliness, the fear, the anger...almost daily I would cry out ”Why did you take him from me?”*

*The flood of sympathy cards eventually brought with them an invitation to participate in grief support activities, like a phone call, an individual support meeting or becoming part of a grief support group. I fought the suggestion because I was not ready or so I believed. Eventually I said to myself, “Why not?”. “I do need help”. I finally chose to go to an individual grief meeting and from there had the courage to go to a group grief support meeting. I cried all the way to the first group meeting, angry at my husband for making me have to go to a group like this. My only thought was “What can they possibly do for my pain?”*

*To my surprise I got to the meeting all by myself. When I entered the room I saw other people who, like me, must be in grief. However, I was convinced none of them hurt as much as I did. When the meeting started we were to introduce ourselves and the circumstances of our loss. When my turn came, I froze. No one laughed, but the lady next to me put her hand over mine and said, “We understand”. The man next to me told his story and wept.*

*So, I thought gratefully, this is what a grief support group is all about. You can let out those feelings, you can cry, you can be angry and everyone understands. The next week, when I felt stronger, I told my story. It felt good to let go of my frustrations, express my fears and cry. To my surprise, I acknowledged that I needed to be there and that I needed these people's support, advice and guidance as much as they needed, and wanted, mine. It gave me a warm sense of security and hope and enabled me to talk about things like new relationships with children and friends, coping with an empty house and to ask myself “Will I ever feel good again?”*

*As I move further along in my grief process, at my own pace, I do feel changes coming. I am slowly healing and learning what is best for me to do, because I feel ready – and not because someone is telling me I should be ready.”*

Blessed Sacrament Grief Support is here to help those in need and seeking comfort, reassurance and a new focus in their lives. If you have reached a point where you are considering asking for guidance and support on your journey, contact the church office at **321 632 6333** or send an email to [secretary@blessedsacramentcocoa.org](mailto:secretary@blessedsacramentcocoa.org). We will be happy to share with you the ways we can help you today and, in the days, ahead. Wherever you are in your journey, we have a place for you to feel welcome and “at home”.

*May Our Lady of Sorrows continue to comfort and heal you  
and protect you on your journey.*

*Many thanks to the Bereavement staff of St Francis Hospice/Reflections Lifestage Care for sharing their grief support thoughts and information with us and for allowing us to offer it as part of Grief Support ministry.*