

Bereavement news for people living with grief



October 2024

Editor:
Erica Gilbert, MSW

henryford.com

How can I learn to manage the loss?

Promote the “grief work”

Face the crisis actively so you may realize the full reality of what has happened. Although it is painful, it is this pain which activates the healing process.

Surround yourself with friends and family

Accept the sympathy of people. You need their warmth and support at the critical moments as well as throughout the grief stages. Do not be afraid to cry with them.

Maintain hope

Paint a realistic picture of what pain you may face. The “grief work” will help you to overcome the intensified pressures of grief.

Establish goals for yourself

Concentrate on serving others and developing new interests. This will relieve your loneliness and give new purpose to your life.

Avoid relying totally on your friends for advice

Often wellmeaning friends may be unfamiliar with the stages of grief or unaware of your true needs. Realize their intentions are certainly for your well-being but sometimes their advice can be misdirected.

Refrain from making hasty decisions

Immediately taking a trip or changing your residence is not the answer. You must cope with the loss first, knowing that “running away” may not help.

Avoid medications such as sedatives

Although drugs may provide some needed relief, they must not be taken for the purpose of avoiding grief entirely. Remember, the “grief work” must be done in order to make the adjustment to your new normal.



How to clean out a deceased loved one's home without burning out emotionally

Excerpts by Lauren Sieben with the inspirations of Vickie Dellaquila author of "Don't Toss My Memories in the Trash"

After the loss of a loved one, the thought of sorting through that person's belongings can be heart-wrenching. However, in many situations, there's no time to delay, especially if you're in a time crunch to get a late family member's house ready to sell.

Give yourself time, but don't delay the process

At a time like this, sorting through your loved one's closets and cabinets is probably the last thing on your mind. Don't push yourself too hard to get started before you're ready, but don't put the task off indefinitely, either. The process of cleaning out a house is individual. Some people hold on to a loved one's house for years which only weighs on them. Start with the easy stuff (e.g. the pantry or the garage) or anything that is less emotionally charged. When you come to the sentimental things, give yourself time to grieve and experience your feelings. You don't want to push yourself to make big decisions before you're ready. This will likely cause regret later. If you find yourself coming up against resistance, put items in a box and go back to them when you're ready.

Ask for help

Clearing out a loved one's home is a massive undertaking, but many people attempt to do it alone. Don't underestimate the emotional (and physical) energy involved, and don't be shy about asking for help when you need it.

When items evoke strong emotions it makes it hard to think clear and decisively. Find friends and professionals who are more objective about the situation and can help you through the process: professional organizers (manage the process start to finish), estate sale professionals (valuables to sell), movers and trash haulers (remove items you don't want) and shredding companies (for documents with sensitive information). Bring in a friend who can toss items like toothbrushes and expired food.

Keep it or toss it? How to decide when emotions are raw

When a loved one dies, the last thing we want to do is get rid of everything that reminds us of them. If you're torn about whether to part ways with something, Dellaquila suggests holding onto just a piece of it—for example, keep a single place setting rather than the full china set. That way, you can hold onto an item that "links" you to your loved one without taking on something you don't have space for.

Finally, resist the urge to keep anything out of obligation. If you won't use it, let it go. Sell it and donate the money to your loved one's favorite charity.

Get ahead of disputes

When siblings start sorting through a parent's belongings, the situation can get tense. Put the items out and like the rules of elementary school take turns choosing items. Item of interest that cannot be split, how about shared custody? Ultimately, decide if the item is worth a bitter fight or the cost of a living relationship.

Give yourself space to grieve

As you make a plan for cleaning out the space, remember that you'll also need time to step back to reflect and recharge. Biting off more than you can chew is a recipe for emotional burnout. Set boundaries with yourself: maybe you clean only one room a day or work for just a few hours at a time. Parting with your loved one's belongings is not a simple process, take the time you need and allow the range of emotions.

Worden's four tasks of grief work

1 Accept the reality of the loss

Accepting the reality of loss can come instantaneously for some, but for most, it will take time. Telling one's "story" in a safe environment, letting oneself think, talk about, and process what has happened, can help. Sometimes we have to repeat it over and over to ourselves: "They're really gone". It's letting ourselves feel the emotions of grief that really solidifies our acceptance of what we have lost.

2 Experience the pain of grief

This is the task people seem to have the hardest time with and the one most are referring to when they ask me, "How do I grieve?" Many of us fear that if we start feeling the intense mix of emotions inside, we may never get back out of them. Yet, this task is at the core of completing all the others. Letting oneself feel pain is not easy, and yet, allowing emotions to arise and express themselves in healthy ways, is at the core of mourning. As I said before, through is the only way out, "...grief requires us to turn inward, to go deep into the wilderness of our soul.... There is usually no quick way out."

3 Adjust to the environment in which the deceased is missing

Using the TEARS method to experience our emotions is key in helping us adjust to the environment in which the deceased is missing. Adjustment takes time and comes as we continually work through the grief emotions that arise. Eventually, we find that we can talk about the deceased and fondly remember them as we engage in new life routines and experiences. Adjusting involves allowing ourselves to adjust, learning to let go, and being willing to move on when we feel ready.

4 Withdraw emotional energy and reinvest it in another relationship

Eventually, we will feel ready to reinvest in other relationships. This doesn't mean we are "replacing" our loved one; rather, it may mean becoming closer to our living family members, bonding in new ways with old friends, making new friends, or creating new intimate relationships that help us feel healthy and healed. We begin to see that life continues after loss, and hopefully we choose to invest in our new life and relationships even while we carry those we have lost in our hearts.

Dealing with grief takes time. It may take months or years to get to the place where these tasks feel complete, but that is just the way grief works. "As long as I am working on my grief, the grief work is working."

From "Fall is my grief season, how about you?"

Understanding Grief by Eleanor Haley

I wonder, do you have a grief season?

At first, it's hard to distinguish your grief season from the rest of the year because every calendar flip brings painful reminders and secondary losses. Birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays lie scattered throughout the year like obstacles and impediments you must manage, each for the first time.

You make it through hurdle after hurdle until you finally flip the page and find the first anniversary of your loved one's death screaming at you from a tiny calendar square. Forget about grief season; you've just experienced an entire grief year.

But it isn't this way forever. I can't say how it will be for you, but for me, over time, my grief became less intense and more manageable. Though my grief comes out of hibernation in the fall, it's generally more diffuse, and there are fewer peaks.

It's typical for grief to change as people adjust to living in a world without their loved ones (while loving them just the same). So most days, your grief may be, at worst, a quiet presence, and there will be periods where grief doesn't monopolize your attention much at all.

But there will also be days and times when you feel the past pulling you back. And when that happens, you may bathe yourself in memories, re-evaluate and ask new questions, or feel a sense of yearning stronger than you've felt in a while. None of these things mean you're backtracking or not "resolving" your grief. Your experience is normal, trust me. It's the story we've all been sold about grief that's wrong.

2024 Bereavement support groups

August - December

2nd Wednesday of the month

10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Location:

Henry Ford Macomb Hospital
Medical Pavilion – 4th Floor Meeting Room #5
16151 19 Mile Road
Clinton Township, MI 48038

Monthly: 7/10, 8/14, 9/11, 10/9, 11/13, 12/11

3rd Tuesday of the month

1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Location:

Virtual via WebEx

Monthly: 7/16, 8/20, 9/17, 10/15, 11/19, 12/17

4th Friday of the month

10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Location:

17333 Federal Drive, Suite 260
Allen Park, MI 48101

Monthly: 7/26, 8/23, 9/27, 10/25, 11/15, 12/20

SandCastles Children's Grief Support Program

SandCastles offers services in Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties, as well as virtually. Call **313.771.7005** or email sandcastles@hfhs.org for more information.



Henry Ford Hospice Bereavement Services

Offers bereavement support to hospice family members, caregivers and anyone in the community 18 years or older who has experienced the loss of a loved one.

Program offerings include:

- Periodic phone calls
- Monthly newsletters
- Support groups
- Grief education
- One/one support is determined on an individual basis.
- Memorial services
- Community resources/referrals

In general, services last for 13 months, but support can be extended or discontinued. These services are free, with no cost to you.

To learn more about these services please call **586.276.9570** or go to www.henryford.com/services/at-home/hospice/support.

Henry Ford provides qualified interpreters and other aids and services for the deaf and hard of hearing at no cost. To request assistance, call Henry Ford Bereavement Services at **586.276.9570**.

If possible, please notify us three days in advance of the event.