

Living With Loss



MOUNT CARMEL
A Member of Trinity Health

Please accept our deepest sympathy and prayers on the death of your loved one.

The ideas in this booklet may be helpful as you cope with your grief.

Not every topic will apply to everyone. Choose what seems to speak to your current needs and save the booklet for future use, or share it with your family and friends.

May your God's healing love and presence be a comfort and strength to you.

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FEELINGS DURING GRIEVING

The loss of a loved one is possibly the most stressful experience any of us will have. While grieving may include crying and feeling sad, it also involves other feelings. People grieve in different ways and in their own time. Working through feelings helps us heal.

If you feel you're getting "stuck" in one of these feelings, you may want to seek the help of a counselor. You can also refer to the support resources described on page 21.

Shock

When a loved one dies, you may be in shock. You may feel numb and not be able to make decisions. Feeling faint or sick is common. You may not show the degree of sorrow you or others expect or go about your daily routine as if nothing has changed.

Shock diminishes as we are comforted and begin to accept that our lives must continue. Sharing how we feel about death and what is now missing moves us closer to healing.

Anger

It is not unusual to feel angry about a death or even angry toward the person who died. Sometimes we search for someone or something to blame because we don't understand what happened, or why it happened.

You may think: "How could you leave me?" "I feel mad at everyone around me." "Little things really irritate me." "How can the world just go on?"

Anger directed toward what we are really angry about is healthy. Anger can be released by talking it out. Physical exercise, such as brisk walking, also helps to release anger.

Regret and Guilt

Thoughts of regret and guilt may include "If only I had visited more often" or "If only I had taken Dad to the doctor sooner." Remember, just because you feel guilty does not mean that you actually did anything wrong. We can find a way to feel guilty no matter how guiltless we may be. It is common to blame yourself for your loss, but these guilty feelings usually go away with time.

Depression or Withdrawal

A lack of emotional and physical energy, feeling empty or hopeless, and continually crying are signs of depression or withdrawal.

Although people invite you out and encourage you to do things, you may feel very alone. You may notice that you don't want to stay at home, but when you leave you are anxious to return.

If these feelings continue long enough to affect your daily life and health, you may benefit from additional support. Talk with your doctor or clergy person, join a support group, or look for a counselor who specializes in grief.

Acceptance

Accepting your loss doesn't mean that you don't miss your loved one or that you care any less. Acceptance allows you to live with the loss. Sometimes such triggers as a song or a fragrance will cause you to feel your grief as if it were fresh. When this happens, it does not mean that you are not coping.

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

The stress of grief can be hard on your body as well as on your soul. Taking care of yourself and working toward a good daily routine can help keep you healthy. Begin with your physical needs.

Physical Responses

You may notice some new physical responses at different times.

- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Crying easily and often
- A change in appetite and/or digestive problems
- A hollow feeling in the stomach
- Lack of energy
- Confusion
- Sudden panic or trouble breathing

If, over time, your troubling symptoms do not ease, talk to your doctor.



Healthful Eating

Changes in appetite may occur during grieving. You may prefer comfort food and snacks. Even though you may not be hungry or feel like eating, balanced meals provide the energy you need to work through the grieving process.

Try to eat a variety of foods from each of the food groups — breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables, milk, and meats or other sources of protein. It is best to eat small meals regularly throughout the day and not to skip meals. Try having small amounts of your favorite foods available.

Unless your doctor has directed you to restrict your fluids because of a health condition, drink at least eight glasses of water each day. This keeps your body working well.

Although junk food and high-fat foods are easy and tempting, limit them as much as you can. These foods are hard to digest and can leave you feeling as if you have less energy.



Getting Rest

You may have trouble sleeping for a period of time after your loss. You may find that your pattern of rest and sleep changes. Your body will tell you when you need rest. Rest whenever you are able.

These tips may be helpful:

- Cut down on the amount of caffeine you consume (found in coffee, tea, chocolate, and many soft drinks).
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink. Alcohol may not allow you to sleep soundly.
- Set a bedtime routine such as walking the dog, reading, or listening to music.
- Stay active during the day, but avoid exercising just before bedtime.
- Try finding spiritual comfort at bedtime. Inspirational reading, prayer, or meditation can help calm and relax you before going to bed.
- Use the relaxation methods described on page 10 at bedtime.

If you still find that you are having trouble sleeping, talk with your doctor. Your doctor may prescribe medicine to help you sleep. You may only need to use the medicine for a night or two to get your sleep pattern back to normal. Be sure to talk to your doctor before taking any over-the-counter or herbal sleep aids.

Staying Physically Active

Physical exercise helps to relieve tension during times of stress and raises your overall energy level. It can also improve your mood and your ability to sleep.

If you have a regular form of exercise, try to resume it as soon as you are able. You may feel better when you return to your normal activities.

If regular exercise is not a part of your lifestyle, you may want to try walking. Walking alone provides time for reflection, and walking with a friend allows you to share your feelings. Both offer excellent stress relief.



Relaxation Ideas

Grieving is emotionally and physically stressful. Taking time to relax will help your body cope with the stress in a healthful way. Find a soothing activity such as reading, listening to music, writing in a journal, or visiting with friends.

Below are some suggestions for ways to relax and ease tension. For best results, find a comfortable, quiet place.

Deep Breathing: Just stop wherever you are. Take a deep breath. Let the air out very slowly. Imagine that you are breathing in energy and breathing out tension. Let all the tension go. Repeat several times throughout the day.

Stretching: Stand or sit and gently reach as high as you can with comfort. Stretch in that position for five seconds. Relax. Repeat.

Rag Doll: Sit in a comfortable chair. Allow your whole body to relax and become limp. Imagine yourself loose and limp just like a floppy rag doll.

Meditation: Meditation can also be helpful. Watching a candle, a fire burning in a fireplace, or fish swimming in a tank are ways to focus as you meditate. Empty your mind of your thoughts as you sit comfortably and focus on the image. Take a couple of deep breaths and allow your body to feel more and more relaxed.

Other Ways to Care for Yourself

It is normal to have low periods and to feel depressed while grieving. Be gentle with yourself as you find a good routine to get you through the dark days. Make taking care of yourself your first priority each day. Resting or doing nothing is fine, as long as you mix in some active times. Don't let yourself become isolated from friends and family. Consider some of these options:

- Invite a friend to eat with you or take a walk together.
- Resume a favorite sport or hobby.
- Go to the movies or the library.
- Visit a park.
- Volunteer to do something for someone else.
- Work in your yard or garden.
- Get a massage.
- Create a scrapbook or fill a photo album.
- Try something new that you've always wanted to do.

These activities will help keep your mind and body active as you heal. Set small, daily goals and don't get discouraged if you sometimes don't feel like doing anything. Your energy and interest will increase with time.

HELPING OTHERS UNDERSTAND

Friends and family members may not know the best way to support you. They may feel awkward around you because they are not sure how to comfort you.

You might ask them to:

- **Call often.** You may not have the energy to call them, but you still want to talk. Tell them that after the first few months their calls may be even more helpful. You may not wish to talk much, or even at all, but regular calls remind us that there are others who love and care for us.
- **Plan a date with you.** Evenings and weekends may feel especially lonely, so it might be good to spend some of that time with your friends.
- **Share memories** of your lost loved one.
- **Express their caring.** If they want to cry when talking to you, it's okay. Crying together and sharing your feelings together can help ease the pain of your loss.
- **Just be with you** if they aren't sure what words to use. A hug or the squeeze of your hand can often mean more than words.
- **Invite you to dinner** or bring food when they visit. It can be hard to cook just for yourself, but it is important to eat.



THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE

Some people find themselves thinking about suicide after a loved one dies. You may believe that this is a way to be with your loved one again. An occasional thought of suicide should not be a concern. Talk to a family member or friend about your thoughts. If you think that you might act on your thoughts of suicide, call someone right away and seek professional help, or call the Suicide Prevention Services in your area.

National Hotline: 800-273-TALK (8255)

Franklin County Hotline: 614-221-5445

Suicidepreventionservices.org



COPING WITH HOLIDAYS

Holidays and other special anniversaries can be very difficult after a loved one has died. Rather than being a time of family joy and sharing, holidays can bring feelings of sadness and loss. No simple guidelines exist that will take away the hurt or the renewed sense of grief that you might feel during these special days.

Here are some suggestions to help ease the pain:

- Consider changing a tradition or creating a new one to honor the holiday. Have a dinner or toast with friends and family to celebrate your loved one's memory. Don't be afraid to cry or to laugh.
- Visit the cemetery or memorial site. Plant a tree or make a donation in your loved one's memory.
- Attend a prayer service or donate flowers to your place of worship in his or her memory.
- Do things because you want to, not because they are expected. Avoid things that cause you stress. Take time to care for your own needs.
- Forgive yourself in advance for enjoying parts of the holiday. This is not a betrayal of your loved one.
- Embrace your memories. They are one of the legacies that exist after the death of a loved one. Instead of ignoring the memories, share them with family and friends.

LOSS OF A SPOUSE

The relationship of husband and wife may be one of the closest in life. The grief you feel after the death of your spouse may be more difficult and last longer than that surrounding other losses in your life.

You may feel torn between the past and the future. Though you know you must move ahead, you may find yourself looking back. This is normal.

You may have trouble making decisions. You may have been doing things jointly for so long that it is now difficult to make choices alone. It helps to find a trusted friend or family member to talk about decisions. Over time, making decisions will be easier.

Becoming single again can be lonely and even frightening at times. Connecting with others, especially those who have also had a loss, may bring needed support.

Raising children alone is also a big challenge. It takes courage to address family needs without a partner. Find resources such as support groups, books and articles, and family members to help you make the adjustment. Your children will also need to explore and share their feelings with you and with other trusted adults.

LOSS OF A PARENT

The death of a parent is one of the most important life events. The loss of your parent forces you to accept your own mortality. To lose someone who was such a central part of your life is hard, no matter what age he or she may have been.

The loss of your parent may require some adjustments in your life. Some may see the death of an older parent as timely and appropriate and yet still feel a deep sense of grief. Share your feelings and thoughts with others who have lost a parent.



LOSS OF A CHILD

A child's death can be especially hard for his or her parents, no matter what the age of the child. Each parent may react differently to a child's death. Because you may not be able to support one another during this time, seek help from others.

As a parent, you may feel guilty that you outlived your child. You lost not only your child but also some of your future hopes and dreams.

For parents who have lost a child, the inability to accept pleasure is one of the biggest barriers to healing. Beginning to enjoy life again doesn't mean you have forgotten your child or no longer grieve for him or her. You will always love and remember your child.

LOSS OF A BROTHER OR SISTER

Your unique relationship with your brother or sister may make your feelings of grief different from the reaction of your other siblings or your parents. You may also believe that you need to protect your parents from your grief.

It can be hard to talk to parents about your feelings at any time, let alone when they have lost a loved one as well. Seek out someone you can talk to. Know that it is okay to forgive yourself for the fights and arguments you may have had with your brother or sister.

You may feel as if there is an empty place in your family, but you can go on living. Remember your sibling but know that it is okay to go on with your life. Be patient with your family members, because each of you will mourn in a different way.



TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT DEATH

How each person reacts to death is shaped by his or her life experiences. For a child, past losses may have been minor, but the events may have caused sadness, pain, and other feelings. Losing a favorite toy or the death of a pet may shape how a child learns about loss.

Each child is different, and how you express your thoughts to a child will vary. Children need to hear your thoughts about death and an afterlife. There are some things to keep in mind when helping children to cope with death:

- Listen to what your child is asking or telling you. You may learn about his or her fears and concerns.
- Be gently direct and honest. Talk with your child in language he or she can easily understand.
- Share your feelings and encourage your child to share his or her feelings. It's okay to cry in front of a child and let him or her comfort you.
- Know that there are no magic words to say, but it is important not to say something that you have to take back later.
- Offer love, comfort, and special time together. It is the sharing and caring with your child that matters. This will help a child understand his or her feelings of grief and loss.

RESOURCES

Ask friends, clergy, the funeral director, and your doctor or counselor for assistance in finding support in your community. Most hospice programs offer support groups that are open to the community.

Support Groups

There are several support groups that may be helpful to you.

The Mount Carmel Hospice offers groups for adults only and for adults with children.

- Call the Evergreen Information line at 614-234-0200 for more details.

The Compassionate Friends group provides support to families following the death of a child of any age. It also provides information to help others be supportive.

- Contact 877-969-0010 or visit online at compassionatefriends.org for information on resources.

Contact the Franklin County Office on Aging at 614-525-6200 for information on area support groups. You may also check in your local paper for other grief support groups that meet at a convenient location and time. Your clergy person may have information about other resources in your area.

Books

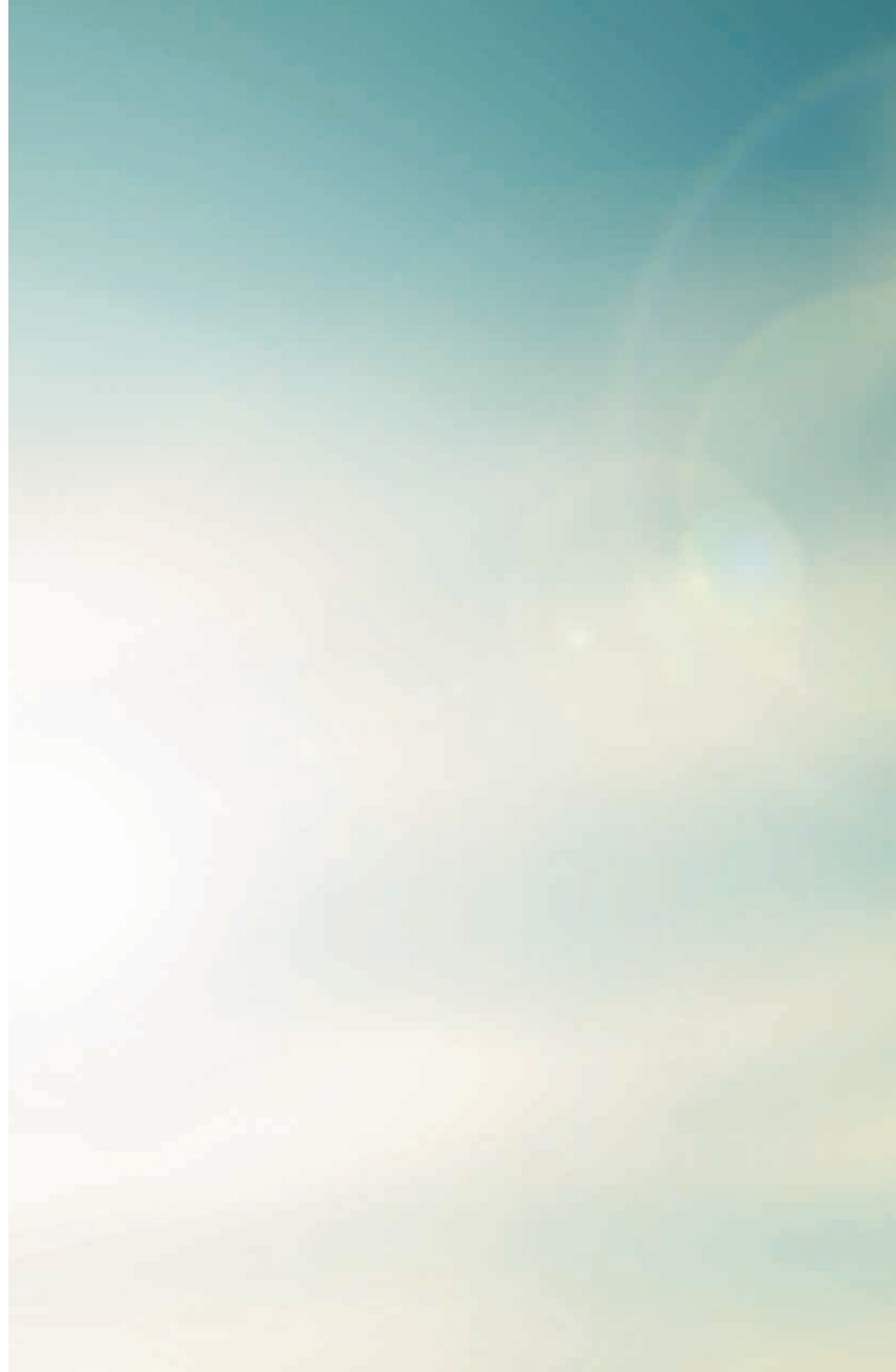
There are many books that discuss loss, grief, and healing. Most of them are available at your area bookstore. Many libraries have books and other materials about loss and grief that you might find helpful.

Healing

The amount of time and the way we heal varies. Take good care of yourself and allow yourself to heal in your own way.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26





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