



JOURNEYS

A newsletter to help with grief

Fall 2018 | Kansas City Hospice & Palliative Care

Back to School, Back to Routines...or Not

by Jacque Amweg, Grief Support Specialist

Maybe it's time to start getting back to school, back to routine...or not. It's been awhile since I've done back-to-school planning, but I see the back-to-school sales and they bring back memories and emotions that can be unexpected.



Sometimes I long for those precious annual activities. I can't believe so much time has passed since I held a little hand on the way into kindergarten. A friend still buys new

crayons every year, even though her children are grown up. It touches on a nostalgic need to be part of this nurturing routine of preparation.

Seasons and events are signals of what comes next. There's usually a flow and rhythm to lives. Think of the regularity of seasons, the routine of weekend schedules, workday patterns of activity or even the habits of meal preparation or bedtime. We have a way of incorporating these ongoing transitions into our lives almost without thinking about it — until we can't.

These transition times can be disrupted in a powerful and painful way when someone important to us dies.

I often hear people say they don't want the death of someone dear to them to change how they live. They want their usual activities—for children to continue their routines—to keep traditions that have always been important. They want to live as though they're not touched by this loss—when the reality is we are forever changed by a death.

Life is bound to be different. Although it may be a comfort to maintain routines and traditions,

it may also help to allow some changes, if needed. Holidays may need to be planned in a new way. We may not feel up to maintaining the same work schedule. We may find less meaning in some activities.

It may be hard to sleep in a half-empty bed. Chores and creative endeavors that used to give a sense of satisfaction may have less importance for awhile. Give some thought to when to force the routine and when to allow a change.

Everything may seem wrong and uncomfortable. Meanwhile, life goes on and you need to determine how (and how not) to keep going. Changing or keeping routines, it takes gentle self-care. This can be a painful and disorienting time.



Rely on a trusted friend or family member to share your experience and find ways of expression that are right for you. If talking to someone about some of these adjustments would be helpful, please give us a call to schedule time with a grief support specialist.

Creative ways to change routines:

- ▶ Sleep on the other side of the bed.
- ▶ Invite a friend on the morning walk.
- ▶ Create something.
- ▶ Read before sleep.
- ▶ Vacation with family.
- ▶ Sleep late.
- ▶ Meditate each morning.
- ▶ Call a friend or family member every day.
- ▶ Plan a special dinner with someone.
- ▶ Arrange an area in your home with some special belongings and photos of the person who died.
- ▶ Shop at different stores.
- ▶ Hire out yard work.
- ▶ Sit in her recliner.
- ▶ Take the day off on his birthday.
- ▶ Light a candle at meals.
- ▶ Say "yes" to a friend's invitation.
- ▶ Tell the story.
- ▶ Don't fight the tears—let them come.

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Dear Coffee Mug

by Jacque Amweg, Grief Support Specialist



Dear coffee mug,

I decided to pour coffee into you today. You have been empty for months now as I seemed to be waiting for him to take you off the shelf. An old favorite, chipped and stained, you have been left behind too. Somehow, today it seems right to hook my fingers into your handle

and remember our shared history together. I've looked across the table at you for years as we sat outside for early morning coffee.

You've been carried from breakfast to the desk, to various projects and back again. You've been in my line of sight during serious conversations, big news and hilarious story-telling. I suppose I took you for granted, thinking that I would always see you across from me or beside me, just as I thought I would always see those warm eyes looking over your steaming contents. From the time he brought you home from our annual vacation spot, because of your perfect weight, size and logo, you were the favorite.

To tell the truth, I could have reached for anything today and it would carry me away to some precious time in our lives together. There is memory in all of these belongings. They are things but there are treasured moments reflected in some of them.

His key chain hangs inside the back door with each key carefully labeled in his handwriting. The alarm clock is still set for his quirky extra 10 minutes of doze time. His chair is next to mine, now in asymmetrical emptiness in a room where we spent so much time together. I often turn to the chair to comment on the news or a funny show, and I see that it is still empty. How could I have forgotten for that moment?

Dear rescue dog,

I didn't want you. I was angry when he brought you and all your needed accessories home without speaking to me first. I would have said no. You need special care and we've had numerous vet trips.



We could never leave the house without considering your needs first, no matter how long we'd be gone. Now I talk to you every day as if you understand every word. I think you do. I told you about my anger toward him, and how it has turned to acceptance and love of you. You look so expressive and steadfast when you respond to my monologue with a paw on my leg or just staying by my side. Now I see what he saw in you.



Dear ragged sweatshirt,

I used to cringe at the sight of you, another old comfy favorite. You started out crisp and bright blue but after many weekends of work and play you are faded and worn. How many pictures have I now seen with you and him? Hundreds, I think. I remember clinging to you for some time after he died. His smell was still present and I could not wash you. I slept with you or covered up with you as I reclined in my chair. It was bittersweet, smelling his scent yet feeling the emptiness. It was some comfort to feel the softness during those aching, longing weeks and months. You are still folded carefully in the drawer and I would never have believed that you would become such a treasured connection to him.

Dear growing garden,

You grow in spite of my past ignorance, or was it indifference? I'm not the one with the green thumb. You give me hope. I used to pull a weed here and there and pray for rain. You are resilient and colorful. I pick your surprise flowers and arrange them on the table in the sunny kitchen. I don't know what to expect next from you, but you are made of hope and future. I want to fashion my way forward with you as my inspiration. I can expect weeds and crawling vines in my personal growing. But there will also be beautiful blossoming color opening to the world. One day I'll notice a green bud and the next, opening, expanding beauty. Dear growing garden, thank you for your endurance. I borrow strength from that.



Send us a letter of your own at website@kchospice.org. Please call Grief Support Services at 816.363.2600 or visit kchospice.org/grief-resources for additional resources.

GRIEF IN THE DIGITAL AGE

by Melissa Waugh, MS, Grief Support Specialist

Grief is an internal process and mourning may make grief public, but what does it mean to go through a private experience when people are used to sharing everything through social media? How do you balance a request for privacy while some people are processing grief online? How do you deal with grief in the digital age?



Online Obituaries

Technology has had a big impact on how memorials are handled. We expect funeral homes to post an online memorial in addition to or in place of a newspaper obituary. It allows the family to have more input and to add photos that are meaningful. Social media can help spread news to friends and family. But, the way social media plays out can also be a bit shocking.

Social Media Jumps In

While close family are dealing with urgent matters surrounding death, other family and friends may start posting on social media, taking a painful and private time public sooner than expected. It can be shocking to learn of a death from an RIP post on Facebook, when the family might have preferred having time to make calls or visits. Some people take comfort from an outpouring of support on social media, while others are appalled, feeling their privacy has been violated.

When two or more family members disagree on how to handle social media, an already painful situation can get much more complicated.

It's important to remember that everyone grieves in their own way. If a family asks for privacy and time, you

hope people will honor those requests. If they don't, each person needs to find a way to grieve while embracing or ignoring social media.

- ▶ If you have access to the deceased's passwords, you can post, delete posts and monitor their accounts.
- ▶ You can delete unwanted posts to your own social media accounts.
- ▶ Take time off from social media if it's upsetting.
- ▶ Designate someone in the family to deal with social media and to reach out to people who might be overstepping the family's wishes.
- ▶ Do not feel pressured to comment on social media if you need time to grieve on your own.

Press Pause

A good guideline for anyone on social media to follow surrounding a death, is to wait for the family to post before initiating anything. It's not your job to scoop everyone and be the first to post. **Wait!**

- ▶ If the deceased is married, wait for the spouse to post.
- ▶ If the deceased is in a relationship, wait for significant other to post.
- ▶ If the deceased is single, wait for parents or siblings to post.
- ▶ If the deceased has no family, wait for closest friend to post.



Social Media Legacy

If the deceased has been active on social media and has not shared passwords, there are ways to handle accounts. Facebook and other social media outlets have changed the way they deal with death and there are more options than ever before. It's now possible to assign your Facebook



account to a "legacy" person, who will be able to take over for you in ways that you designate. Each service offers guidelines in their "help" section.

If accounts are left open, reminders and interactions can continue as before, and might be painful. It may be hard to see a birthday reminder for a deceased friend, while another person may find it a beautiful way to share a memory. So, decide how you want to take care of your own needs and think about what you might see in advance. It's fine to limit your time or to avoid social media on days that might prove painful.

If accounts are memorialized, then others can share memories, but the account no longer functions. This can be a way for extended family and friends to share memories and cope with grief. Plus, it can be more easily avoided by those who find it stressful.

It could be shocking to be notified of their funeral from a friend's Facebook page, but it can be easier on the family to use the deceased's own contacts to make sure everyone is informed.

A family might set up a group on Facebook for people in diverse locations. It's one way to share memories and deal with grief that might be too painful face-to-face. Plus, it lets people who are unable to travel, to be a part of the grief process.

Whatever your feelings about social media, it's become part of our lives and another aspect to consider when dealing with the death of a loved one.



Kansas City Hospice & Palliative Care

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Support Group Schedule

Kansas City Hospice offers workshops and grief support groups. Groups are designed for adults at least two or three months past their loss.

There is no charge to attend groups, but registration is required. We may close when group is full, or cancel due to low registration.

For questions or to register, please call Grief Support Services at **816.363.2600**

Spouse/Partner Loss Monthly Drop In Group

First Tuesdays, 3-4:30 pm, First Presbyterian Church, 1625 NW O'Brien Road Lee's Summit, please register.

Easing Grief Through Yoga

Every other Thursday, 9:45-10:45 pm, Solace House, 8012 State Line Road, \$10 suggested donation, please register.

Easing Grief Through Writing

Thursdays, Aug 30, Sep 6 & 13, 3-4:30 pm, Solace House, 8012 State Line, register by Aug 23.

Camp Carousel

Weekend of Sept 14 at the Heartland Center in Parkville. Retreat for grieving families. Space is limited!

The Grief Journey-North

Wednesdays, Sep 24-Oct 22, 3-4:30 pm, KCH North Office, 2000 NE Vivion, register by Sept 17.

The Grief Journey-Kansas

Mondays, Sep 20-Oct 18, 3-4:30 pm, Kansas City Hospice Kansas Office, 10100 W 87th, register by Sept 13.

The Grief Journey-East

Mondays, Oct 1-31, 3-4:30 pm, Good Shepherd Community of Christ, 4341 Blue Ridge Blvd, register by Sept 24.

Coping with the Holidays

Nov 5, 6-7:30 pm, Kansas City Hospice House 12000 Wornall, KCMO, register by Oct 29.

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Nov 12, 6-7:30 pm, Barry Room, North Kansas City Hospital, register by Nov 5.

Additional Grief Resources



Solace House
Center for Grief and Healing

913.341.0318
solacehouse.org

SkillBuilders - Education and Support for Widows, Widowers and Caregivers

913.648.1520

Grief Support Network
griefsupportnetwork.org

Visit Us Online

kchospice.org/grief/
Learn about our services, resources, previous issues of *Journeys* and more.

Sign up for Email

kchospice.org/email-signup/
Choose areas of interest & receive *Journeys* by email.