

Journeys

A newsletter to help with grief



Kansas City Hospice
& PALLIATIVE CARE

Early Stages of Grief

KCH Grief Support Services

Grief is a normal and natural response to a loss. It is unique to everyone and at times, grief may feel overwhelming. It is important to remember that grief is not a problem to be solved, but rather, a process to be lived. Remember, you don't have to grieve alone.

Kansas City Hospice & Palliative Care (KCH) provides a range of grief support services to help you and your family in your journey of grief and healing. For more information or to get connected to a KCH grief support specialist, visit KCHospice.org/grief or call 816.363.2600.

Hospice Bereavement

KCH provides grief support for families whose loved one was cared for by our hospice services for a year following the loss. Services include supportive calls, individual sessions, and expressive therapy groups with alternatives to traditional grief support, such as art and music. Kansas City Hospice also provides several community grief support groups and workshops to help you such as: Navigating Grief, The Grief Journey, Men's Group, Music Speaks: Exploring Grief & Healing Through Music, Spouse/ Partner Loss, and Hope Through the Holidays. Families will also receive mailings with information and articles regarding grief support.

KCH also hosts an annual Circle of Lights ceremony of remembrance. This free event brings together people from the community to remember and honor the loved ones they have said goodbye to. It also provides a meaningful opportunity to memorialize your loved one with a donation in their name that will be used to provide end of life and grief support services to other families in-need.

Solace House, Center for Grief and Healing

Solace House, a center for grief and healing, guides children, adults and families through a pivotal time following the death of a loved one, to help you from the emotional effects of loss, whether sudden or anticipated. Thanks to our donors, we are able to offer the following programs:

Support Groups

Support groups are facilitated by trained volunteers and provide the opportunity for children, teens, and families to share, listen, learn, and heal with others who have experienced the loss of someone close to them. Support groups help people of all ages express their emotions and anxieties through storytelling, art, and sharing.

Counseling

Solace House has two unique outpatient mental health counseling programs. The New Hope program specializes in grief and loss. Families focus on natural grief reactions and exploring their unique grief journey. The Passages program is staffed with licensed counselors and social workers and is designed to address more complicated symptoms of grief. Passages therapists specialize in prolonged grief, difficult life transition, and trauma.

Grief Camps

Grief support camps offer a retreat for children and families who have experienced the death of a loved one. The camp experience combines grief education and emotional support with fun, traditional camp activities. Families learn how to explore their grief, learn essential coping skills, and connect with peers who are grieving.

Raw Grief

by Alisha Bozarth

Adapted with permission from AlishaBozarth.com

Raw grief feels like drowning. Every single reality check is your heart trying to comprehend what your brain is telling you is true. The finality of loss and the vapor of a life you can no longer grasp.

A thousand thoughts taking away your innocence. A thousand reminders like acid on a cut.

A diamond shifts in the light and sparkles. But raw grief is a diamond with a thousand faces. And every shift of life brings to light yet another blinding, unwanted truth. No sparkle, just gravity, pulling you down, stealing your breath.

Raw grief is being numb to everything but the pain. This fog of indifference envelopes you. The kids didn't eat their vegetables? The plants didn't get watered? Who cares? Not you. You're just trying to breathe. They say to forget about your toe hurting, smash a finger. Well, that is how you feel. The throb in your soul drowns out all other cares.

Raw grief is dealing with firsts. Not just the big ones like anniversaries and birthdays, but the little ones. The first piece of mail addressed to him. The first phone call asking for him that you have to utter those infamous words. The first trip to the grocery store where your shopping list doesn't include his things. The first family function where his absence is felt everywhere.

Raw grief is being full of illogical thoughts. What would he say if he were here? How would I respond if he walked in this room right now?

How would he handle this if the roles were switched? And we torture ourselves with the impossible. We make ourselves miserable with these thoughts but can't let go of them.

Raw grief is the word 'never' becoming a foul word because it taunts you with what will never be again. Once again, that shift of the grief diamond. He will never sit in that chair again. He will never watch this show with me. He will never see our girls married. He will never...you begin to hate that word. And daily, the nevers pounce.

Raw grief is that paranoia of memories losing their vibrancy. Like trying to grasp the wind, you desperately try to clutch them. And panic sweeps in when they fade against your will.

In a slow, migrant journey, the shift of the grief diamond loses its vibrancy. What was once blinding light has dimmed. You are able to examine your feelings and the changes in your life without having to look away. The tyrannical waves that whelmed you shift to surges from which you merely lose your footing.

And then those waves fade until you are enveloped with tender currents that are gentle reminders of the tempest you have walked through.

Though the water surrounds you, it is no longer your tyrant. Your head can now stay above water with the flux of grief's influence. Your breath, instead of gasps, become deeper and steadier, revitalizing a new form of life.

If you should feel overwhelmed, call Grief Support Services at 816.363.2600. We're here to listen and support you.



The Rollercoaster of Grief

“Am I grieving the right way?” Because grief is a subject not often talked about in our society, there are unspoken rules about how much emotion is considered acceptable and at some point after the death, typically within the first two to three months of loss the bereaved are expected to “move on” from the grief. The truth is there is no “one right way” to grieve. Grief is a natural reaction to loss. Each grief experience is unique and is based on multiple factors such as the quality of the relationship between the bereaved and their deceased loved one and the coping style of the bereaved.

Instead of thinking of grief as linear, like stops on a train, think of it as a roller coaster with ups, downs, and loops. Sometimes you feel light and other times you feel heavy. There will be days that you feel positive and optimistic about your healing only to spiral back into sadness and emotional pain within days or hours. There is no specific pattern to grief, no stages we are supposed to attain. Once we understand that there is no “right” way to grieve, we can give ourselves permission to have any feelings that come along. We can accept that the swings in emotions are in fact, part of the process of grief.

Early Grief

It is not unusual for those who have experienced the loss of a loved one to describe themselves as if they are going through the motions. Some describe this as if they were in a dream or as if they are watching themselves in a movie. This feeling is often identified as numbness or referred to as a “grief fog.” It is a protective mechanism that our body uses while the many tasks related to final arrangements of a loved one are being concluded, such as a memorial service, notifying friends and family, legal matters such as acquiring a death certificate, all in addition to taking care of the requirements of everyday living.

You might find that you ask yourself “What do I do now?” as daily life has changed so dramatically. As that fog lifts and the numbness fades you may come to the swift realization that “this is real.” You may find that your sleep is affected, your appetite altered, or you might be experiencing aches and pains that seemingly have no cause. You may find that your emotions change from moment to moment. While the old adage “time heals all wounds” is not true following the death of someone close, you will reach a point where you learn to live with the scar on your heart and find comfort in knowing that someone so special will never be forgotten.



While each person progresses through grief at their own pace, there are some strategies you can use to help on your journey to heal.

Be with the pain - Recognize that you are hurting. Feeling pain after loss is normal and a testament of the love you have for your loved one who died. Allow yourself to cry and share about how you are feeling with people you trust.

Take good care of you - You may not feel like it but it is important to take care of yourself. Get plenty of rest, stick with a schedule, exercise, make small achievable goals, call a friend, or contact a counselor. Do not be surprised if your enjoyment of things is not the same. This is to be expected. Also give yourself permission to clear your schedule from time to time to lay on the couch, binge watch a show, or do absolutely nothing.

Keep major decision making to a minimum - You have been through a major loss and may feel the urge to make big changes in your life. If you can, give yourself time, preferably a year. Once the “grief fog” has lifted, make changes gradually.

Seek Comfort - Seek out, and accept, support from others! It is human and courageous.

Tomorrow will come - You are much more than the emotional wound you are currently carrying. You will survive this and your smile will return one day. Be gentle with yourself until then.



Kansas City Hospice & PALLIATIVE CARE

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Recommended Grief Resources

Websites:

KCHospice.org
Whatsyourgrief.com
Elunanetwork.org
Childrengrieve.org
Refugeingrief.com
AfterTalk.com
Griefshare.org

Podcasts:

What's Your Grief
Grief Out Loud (The Dougy Center)
Terrible, Thanks for Asking (Nora McInerney)
Everything Happens (Kate Bowler)

Specific Loss and/or Experience Resources in the KC Community:

Zero Reasons Why - Mental awareness and suicide prevention school program

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255 - 24/7 support

SASS KC - Programs for families who have experienced a suicide death

Compassionate Friends - Programs for families who have experienced the death of a child

Turning Point - Programs for families facing a lifelong or life-ending illness

Gilda's Club - Programs for families experiencing a cancer diagnosis

First Call - Programs for families experiencing issues related to substance use disorders

Healing Pathways - Programs for families who have experienced a homicide or suicide death

Advent Health - Programs for families who have experienced pregnancy or infant loss

Additional Grief Resources



SOLACE HOUSE
Kansas City Hospice
& PALLIATIVE CARE

913.341.0318

SolaceHouse.org

Grief Support Network
griefsupportnetwork.org

What's Your Grief?
whatsyourgrief.com

Visit Us Online
KCHospice.org/grief

Learn about our
services, resources,
previous issues of
Journeys and more.