

Caring Connections

A hope and comfort in grief program

Volume 15, Issue 3

Spring 2011

Grief Line: (801) 585-9522

A Message from the Director Kathie Supiano



We have many upcoming events scheduled for this spring which reflect our mission, “To provide excellent evidence-based bereavement care to grieving persons in the intermountain west through clinician facilitated support groups, to provide opportunity for clinical education in grief and loss, and to conduct

research which promotes greater understanding of loss, grief and bereavement.”

On April 20, we are pleased to again serve as a host site for the Hospice Foundation of America’s annual educational event on End-of-Life Care, this year focusing on spiritual well-being. We are delighted that our May 17 *Seeds of Remembrance* event will feature acclaimed writer Emma Lou Thayne and award winning artist Sue Martin. These exceptional programs would not be possible without the generous support of our event sponsor, MediConnect Global and our sustaining partner, Larkin Mortuary. The faithful support of community sponsors and donors enables us to expand our care of grieving persons and fulfill our service mission.

The research mission of *Caring Connections* is supported by the Ben B. and Iris M. Margolis Foundation, and includes our ongoing research in suicide survivorship, and a new initiative to study interventions in complicated grief in older adults. Details of all of these activities may be found within this newsletter.

Our core mission remains the care of grieving persons, and we welcome you to consider participation in our spring grief support groups, including an initiative to

expand suicide survivor group programs in Davis County with support from Lindquist Mortuary. If you are navigating the tumultuous territory of grief, or are supporting those who are grieving, we consider it a privilege to companion you in this journey.

Kathie Supiano

“To those who see with loving eyes, life is beautiful. To those who speak with tender voices, life is peaceful. To those who help with gentle hands, life is full. And to those who care with hearts, life is good beyond measure.” Author Unknown

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Upcoming Grief Groups
SPRING: Eight Weekly Sessions

Salt Lake City

May 11 - June 29, 2011
(Wednesday Evenings)
6:00 - 7:30 p.m. (All groups)

University of Utah College of Nursing
Annette Poulson Cumming Building
10 South 2000 East
Salt Lake City, UT 84112

This location offers seven types of grief groups, all in the evening:

- Children (7-11) - Adjusting to the death of a loved one
- Adolescents (12-17) - Adjusting to the death of a loved one
- Adjusting to the death of a loved one (adult traditional)
- Adjusting to the death of a spouse or partner
- Adjusting to the death of a loved one to suicide
- Adjusting to the death of a loved one to murder
- Adjusting to the death of a loved one to perinatal loss

Midvale
(South Salt Lake)

May 12 - June 30, 2011
(Thursday Evenings)
6:00 - 7:30 p.m. (Two groups)

UUHC Greenwood Health Center
7495 South State Street
Salt Lake City, UT 84047

Two adult grief groups for those adjusting to the death of a loved one (**traditional**), or adjusting to the death of a loved one to **suicide**.

Orem

May 11 - June 29, 2011
(Wednesday Evenings)
5:30 - 7:00 p.m. (Two groups)

University of Utah Parkway Health Center
145 West University Parkway
Orem, UT 84058

Two adult grief groups for those adjusting to the death of a loved one (**traditional**), or adjusting to the death of a loved one to **suicide**.

Caring Connections
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To register for any class or location, please call:
(801) 585-9522.

There is a fee of \$50. If this fee is a hardship, please notify *Caring Connections*. Scholarships are available.

Should there not be enough people registered for a particular group, the group may be postponed.

Visit us online at:

www.nursing.utah.edu/practice/caringconnections

The Starfish Story by Loren Easley

One day a man was walking along the beach when he noticed a boy picking something up and gently throwing it into the ocean. Approaching the boy, he asked, “What are you doing?”

The youth replied, “Throwing starfish back into the ocean. The surf is up and the tide is going out. If I don’t throw them back, they’ll die.”

“Son,” the man said, “don’t you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can’t make a difference!” After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it back into the surf. Then, smiling at the man, he said, “I made a difference for that one.”



Used by permission: The ACE Project; Advocating for Clinical Excellence. City of Hope-Pasadena, CA. 2010.

Help for Helpers: Helping Someone Who Has Suffered a Loss

Most of the readers of this newsletter are intimately acquainted with loss and grief, and because of their life experiences, may be drawn to or reach out to others who are suffering. Yet, all of us can find ourselves at a loss for words, or uncertain about what to do when we learn of someone who has experienced the death of a loved one. We have learned from our participants how frustrated they feel at the well-intentioned but often thoughtless things people say or do in the time of grief.

Finding Balance in Helping

Supporting a grieving friend or family member can be exhausting. We offer our time and energy in caring, because we genuinely want to see our friend’s suffering end. But grief takes time and healing toward a new life comes slowly. Our efforts in caring can seem ineffective and inconsequential. The pain we observe in the one we are supporting seems unrelentless.

Helpers do well to revisit their expectations from time to time. The most valuable helping is companionship, not problem solving. Being present, being faithful, continuing to listen are the gifts that matter most. Change may come, or it may not come as we hope. But small kindnesses do make a difference...at least to that single starfish.

Book Review

A Broken Heart Still Beats: After Your Child Dies, Anne McCracken & Mary Semel, Editors, 1998, Hazelden Books.

This classic book for parents who have lost a child is unique in that it is not a how-to self-help book, nor advice from experts. The editors of this volume are themselves grieving parents. They have carefully selected a collection of poems, essays and works of fiction that convey the varied experiences of parental grief. The authors add their own insights to works from such diverse writers as Shakespeare, Anne Morrow Lindbergh, Mark Twain, Jane Kenyon and Dostoevsky, and have crafted a volume that addresses guilt, anger and sorrow, relationships and memories, the passage of time and the legacy of loss. Readers of this anthology will be able to select passages that touch their own experiences and transitions in grief, and will be both affirmed and edified.



News in Bereavement Research

Riley, L. P., LaMontagne, L. L., Hepworth, J. T. and Murphy, B. A. (2007). *Parental grief responses and personal growth following the death of a child. Death Studies, 31, 4, 277-299.*

Many research studies have affirmed the catastrophic nature of the death of a child to parents. This study by Riley and colleagues affirms the depth of the parental grief, but is one of the first to illuminate the aspects of dispositional factors that allow grieving parents to experience some measure of personal growth in the face of loss. In their analysis of mothers who lost a child under the age of 21, the authors found that three styles of coping were associated with the ability to accomplish personal growth in grief; those who used active coping, that is were taking initiative in their grief, those who sought out helpful social supports, and those who were able to maintain a more positive or optimistic outlook on life were less likely to experience complicated grief. The mothers who were able to find personal growth in loss experienced the death of a child every bit as deeply as others, but they were able to use effective coping strategies and attitudes to manage the experience of loss. The researchers suggest that a better understanding of the attitudes and coping styles of grieving persons will allow clinicians to more effectively tailor their care of grieving persons.

Cortney Nebeker is a second year student in the Master's of Social Work program at the University of Utah with an emphasis in Substance Abuse. She returned to school after completing her undergraduate work at the University of Utah with a double major in Finance and International Relations. Currently, she works at the Huntsman Cancer Hospital as an MSW intern with Patient and Family Support.

In addition to her work at Huntsman Cancer Hospital, Cortney has worked with the Adolescent Residential Treatment & Educational Center (ARTEC) a program for teens through Valley Mental Health. She also spent two years working as a psychiatric technician at the University of Utah Neuropsychiatric Institute. With a passion for international travel, Cortney has seized many opportunities to travel the world while making a difference in the lives of others, including living in Thailand for a summer while helping victims of the tsunami and spending the summer of 2010 in Guatemala completing an independent study working in schools and teaching life sustaining skills to villagers.

This is Cortney's second opportunity to co-facilitate a group with Caring Connections and she says she has learned a great deal from facilitators Ann Hutton, Kathie Supiano and Laurie Crookston, and from participants. "I have been very impressed with the groups and services provided, and I continue to be amazed by the power of support and also by the strength of those experiencing grief," she says. "I feel honored to be able to be a part of it." Cortney looks forward to graduating in May and to pursuing her career path "where her path may lead."

Caring Connections Mission: to provide excellent evidence-based bereavement care to grieving persons in the intermountain west through clinician facilitated support groups, with particular attention to the care of families served by the University of Utah Hospitals and Clinics; and, in keeping with the academic mission of the University and the College of Nursing, to provide opportunity for clinical education in grief and loss to students in the health care professions, and to conduct research which promotes greater understanding of loss, grief and bereavement.

Caring Connections is able to carry out our mission thanks to the generous support of our sustaining sponsor:

Over 125 Years Serving Utah Families



Mortuaries • Cemeteries • Mausoleums • Cremation Center

Creative Coping When Spring Seems a L-O-N-G Way Off: Self-Care for the Griever



By Darcie D. Sims, PhD, GMS, ST, CHT

Spring is almost here and still it seems to be winter inside me. Will I ever thaw? Will the sun ever warm my heart again? Will I ever be happy again? Will I ever laugh or dance or dream again? Am I doomed to live the rest of my days caught in grief's icy grasp? I want to feel the warm spring breeze brush across my face and not find tears trickling down my cheeks. I do not want to take up permanent residence within my soul.

Grief seems to be lasting for longer than I thought it should. There are still days and nights and hours and even moments when the pain is as fresh as it was at first. Will it ever be spring inside me again?

There are no shortcuts to healing from the death of a loved one. Grief takes far longer than anyone thinks it should. Grief hurts! There are no words in any language that will make it all right that someone you loved has died. But there are things that we can do that can break through the icy silence that seems to surround us in our despair. We can learn to nurture and care for ourselves in the winter of our grief.

It is not a choice of pain or no pain, but how we manage the pain we feel. We must come to understand that grief is a natural and normal reaction to loss, of any kind. Grief is not a sign of weakness or a lack of faith. It is the price we pay for love. So, we will feel pain and grief and sorrow and sadness and emptiness, but none of these feelings indicate we are not grieving correctly. Whatever we are feeling is a part of the grief process, and the sooner we can relax into whatever we are experiencing, the sooner we may be able to learn to work with our grief instead of denying it or hiding it. So, let's explore some tips for caring for ourselves:

- **Acknowledge that life is stressful.** Give yourself permission to hurt, to grieve. Be specific in your acknowledgement of the pain, hurt, and grief. What hurts? (Your head, your heart, your arms?) Once we know what hurts, we can figure out how to help that specific hurt.
- **Be Yourself.** Realize that everyone reacts differently to a loss. It is too hard to try to be

someone else and he might be having an even worse time and who needs that? Take off the mask and know you don't have to be okay every moment of every day.

- **Make a SMILE-ON-A-STICK** for those days when you don't have the energy to be what others need you to be. Whenever someone asks, "How are you?" you can whip out your smile-on-a-stick and snarl (from behind the stick) "I'm fine." They will see the smile and you did not have to be something you're not.

- **Focus on only one worry at a time.** This helps combat being overwhelmed by worries. If you find focusing on only one-at-a-time difficult, write each worry down on a separate 3x5 index card and give them to your friends. Just give them to someone else for awhile. You can handle one worry at a time. Let the others go.

- **Take care of yourself physically.** Remember that grief is also a physical response to loss. Eat right (eating the cookie box fulfills the fiber requirements easily), exercise (at least buy the shoes) and find the stress relief that physical activity brings. If nothing else, jog your memory.

- **Don't deny yourself the gift of healing tears.** Cry whenever you wish. Trying to stop tears just leads to a terribly sore throat and smudged mascara. Be prepared, however, because you never know when the tears will start. Carry lots of tissues with you at all times. I have found a roll of toilet paper is more practical and no one ever asks why I am carrying it.

- **Be kind to yourself.** Learn to forgive yourself first. Chocolate helps. When there are no words, there is always chocolate. Do not eat the entire box, however. One piece will do.

- **Listen to everyone, but follow your own music.** You know more intuitively about what you need than anyone else. We sometimes just have to learn to grow quiet within and listen to the wisdom of the self.

- **Create a supportive network of people.** Find those who will allow you to be whoever you are at the moment and give them cookies and a big thank you. These people are the treasures, the lifelines for us.

- **Ask for what you need.** Make a large HELP sign and stand on your porch and wave it. No matter how much people love us, they may not see our despair or hurt. Most would be happy to help if they only knew that we needed support.

- **Banish ought and should from your life.** Write these two words on a piece of paper and eat it. Better you consume them before they consume you.

- **Find some constructive outlets for your emotions.** Find some creative ways to release the anger, guilt or despair you may be feeling. Tossing marshmallow, yelling in the backyard, hitting a pillow or breaking garage sale china (tossing it into a large box out in the backyard works wonders) will help put the motion back into the emotion. Talking about intense feelings does not always help. Find a personally non-destructive way to express the intensity of an emotion. Having an adult temper tantrum within planned boundaries is a wonderful way to release the tension of grief.

- **Don't forget how to laugh-or dream.** Insist on joy every day even if it is only a remembered moment. Remember a funny incident you shared with your loved one or a dream you once had that made you smile. Let those moments of light come back into your life, not to be counted as what you no longer have, but to be cherished for what they truly are moments of LOVE that are yours forever.

- **Buy a pair of rose-colored glasses and wear them whenever you need to see things in a different way.** They are a change in perspective. We cannot control what happens to us, but we can control what we do with what happens to us, and rose-colored glasses help remind me of my own power to see things in many different ways.

- **Remember the love.** Our loved ones died, but we did not lose them or the love we shared. Even if your love lived only for moments or perhaps was never born, love has a name, and you know it by heart. Don't lose that love in the despair of grief.

- **Be gentle in your despair.** Be creative in your grief. Let the joy of your loved one's life begin to take the place of the hurt and pain of his death. Remember, though death has come, love never goes away.

May Spring come soon!

Grief Digest Quarterly Magazine Vol. 1 Issue 3. January 2004. Reprinted with permission.

Forgiveness

By Jack and Fran Munday



One of the most difficult issues mourners face is the question of forgiveness. In one support-group session, we met a couple whose son had been murdered, shot by his landlord. The mother could not stop talking about once having served coffee to the one who had taken her son's life. Her whole being was flooded with rage.

The victim's father added that a priest had insisted that they, the parents, must try to forgive the killer, even though he had pleaded not guilty and showed no remorse or repentance. Fortunately, another priest gave them permission to be angry. He also suggested they talk to others who had suffered a similar tragedy, which is why they were in our support group. The mother said, "I can't forgive the one who took away my future."

When we shared our story, briefly telling the group about Marlys and her case, we said we had had plenty of time to think about forgiveness between the 1979 murder and the 1998 conviction. The newly bereaved mother asked if we had forgiven the one who took Marlys from us.

"During the trial," the father added, "did you even think of forgiveness?"

Jack said, "Of course we didn't. He hasn't even repented. He denies all the murders even though three different juries have found him guilty beyond a reasonable doubt." Then Jack added, "But think about this. What is the opposite of forgiveness?"

"Hate," said the mother.

Jack told the couple that forgiveness and revenge were words with opposite meanings. Seeking revenge, in whatever way possible, is what happens when we hate. We want to act out our rage in a concrete way, imagining the absolute worst for the one who so terribly shattered our lives as well as ending a life that was precious to us. "But if we carry out that act, we become no better than the one we hate." "So," he continued, "since I don't really hate the murderer (and it is true I really don't), I must have forgiven him enough to at least avoid being a second victim. I haven't let him take my life from me too."

"Forgiveness is impossible for me right now," the mother said.

"I could never do that," the father added. Sometime later we spoke with the father. There had been a verdict. The murderer, now fifty-seven years old, received a sentence for second-degree murder. "How do you feel about it?" we asked. He seemed eager to talk.

"My son" he said, "was in the wrong place at the wrong time. That's all. The guy had lots of troubles. A major chain store put his small business under. He had a mortgage on a house he brought with a girlfriend, and she left him. My son just happened to come along on the wrong day."

This father seemed to have accepted the circumstances, probably felt good that his son had not provoked the attack, though we wouldn't ask him about that. "You seem at peace," we did say.

"I still feel the pain. But it helps to know why my son died."

"That's right," we replied. "You're doing fine." The support group didn't take away grief but he did find comfort.

After that session, we talked with a pastor who wanted to know more about forgiveness. He had a religious perspective that said that forgiveness was necessary. He also wanted to know if we had forgiven the one who murdered Marlys. He added that he knew some people who were "carrying a grudge" about something in their lives, though not as tragic as our loss. He wondered what we thought about the serial killer out west who confessed to killing 48 women? He also asked if we knew the

people in Northern Minnesota who had forgiven the one who raped and murdered their daughter. He had a lot about forgiveness on his mind.

As we like to do, we told him some stories or anecdotes to answer his concerns. "First," we said, "we don't think about the one who is serving six consecutive life sentences for his serial killer crimes - at least not very often." Jack told him how he had asked our daughter, Lynn, if she thought about her sister, Marlys. Lynn said she did almost every day.



Then he asked her if she thought about the killer. Lynn thought for a moment then said, "I don't think about him much at all. Not for weeks on end, really."

We see that as the type of forgiveness that makes our lives better. Lynn is not another victim of that serial murderer. He doesn't "live in her head" or consume her life. She misses Marlys, as we all do, but she has gone beyond the crime to the good memories. Lynn is a nurse, in part in memory of her sister.

We added that we thought the serial killer out west now has the rest of his life to think about what he did, certainly in protective custody. In Minnesota that means twenty-three hours a day alone in a cell, and we assume no better treatment out west.

The idea of carrying grudge is another example of not forgiving someone, so that the anger and hurt remain, renewing themselves. We told the pastor that all forms of loss need to be dealt with, whether it is the death of a child or something less tragic but still

difficult, like the loss of a job or having one's house burn to the ground as happened in California last fall. Those people are facing losses that will remain with them for a long time. They no longer have family photo albums, or heirloom china, or maybe the family Bible. They have grief work to do.

We suggested that the pastor talk to those persons whom he worried about who were holding grudges. We encouraged him to ask them to talk about the incident, then to share any similar experiences he's

had that come to mind. Affirm their right to feel pain at a thoughtless act. Also, ask them if they had ever done something that might have hurt someone else.

Talking about what bothers us is the first step in overcoming the pain and suffering that have damaged the relationship. Some might even call it forgiveness.

Grief Digest Quarterly Magazine. Vol 1 Issue 4. April 2004. Reprinted with permission.

Caring Connections in the Community: Upcoming Events

Caring Connections is pleased to offer the following upcoming events:

Suicide Survivor Group in Layton

Thursdays Evenings
March 31 to May 19, 2011
6:00 to 7:30 p.m.

Weber State University-Davis Campus
2750 N. University Parkway, Room 229
Layton, UT 84041

We extend a special invitation to military veterans and their families. To register, call (801) 585-9522. A generous donation from Lindquist Mortuary allows us to offer this program and materials at no cost.



18th Annual Hospice Foundation of America Conference: Spirituality and End-of-Life Care

Wednesday, April 20, 2011
10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
University of Utah College of Nursing
Annette Poulson Cumming Building
10 South 2000 East on the University of Utah Campus

Registration is \$15, which includes lunch and conference materials. CE credits are available for \$25 (3CR). Parking is available at a nearby parking structure; as with all university events, we encourage carpooling. Organizations may reserve a display table for \$25. To register, call (801) 585-9522.

Thank you to our event sponsor:



Seeds of Remembrance

Tuesday, May 17, 2011
7:00 p.m.
University of Utah College of Nursing
Annette Poulson Cumming Building
10 South 2000 East on the University of Utah Campus

Seeds of Remembrance is an opportunity for people who have lost a loved one to gather for a presentation on grief while commemorating the memory of their loved one.

Our program this year, "The Expressive Arts: Ways to Remember Those We Love" will feature renowned Utah poet Emma Lou Thayne and award winning painter Sue Martin.

Seeds of Remembrance is free and open to the public.

Announcements

Prefer to receive immediate updates? If you are not yet on our electronic mailing list and would like to be included, call (801) 585-9522. Help us help the environment *and* lower costs.

Do you have stories or experiences concerning grief or the grief groups that you would like to share? Please mail them to Caring Connections, C/O the University of Utah College of Nursing, 10 South 2000 East, Salt Lake City, UT 84112. Or send them via email to shawna.rees@nurs.utah.edu



A tile on the Caring Connections memory wall is a lovely way to honor your loved one while supporting the program's services. In photo: Program Administrator Shawna Rees.

Remember Your Loved Ones—Caring Connections Memory Wall Order Form

Memory Wall (located in entry hallway to **Caring Connections**)

4" by 4" Tiles: \$35.00

Male: First Name _____ Middle Initial _____ Last Name _____
 Birth Year _____ Death Year _____

Female: First Name _____ M. I. or Maiden Name _____ Last Name _____
 Birth Year _____ Death Year _____

Send checks and information to: *Caring Connections: A Hope and Comfort in Grief Program*
 University of Utah College of Nursing
 10 South 2000 East
 Salt Lake City, UT 84112-5880



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