

# *Praise for Understanding Your Grieving Heart*

“After debunking myths about the grieving process, that it lasts only a few months, Mary M. McCambridge (editor, *The National Directory of Bereavement Support Groups and Services*) traces the stages of grief (shock, denial, despair, renewal), manifestations (e.g. regrets, depression, anger, workaholism) and effects on marriage, children, friendship and work relationships in *Understanding Your Grieving Heart After a Loved One’s Death*. Even if we’ve seen others mourn a loss, says Mary, we may be taken by surprise at our responses to the death of an intimate, particularly the sense of being out of control that often accompanies bereavement. Grieving readers will appreciate this warm, wise guide by an experienced bereavement counselor and crime victims’ rights advocate.”

*Publisher’s Weekly, November 26, 2001*

“*Understanding Your Grieving Heart After a Loved One’s Death* is an invaluable guidebook on how to offer comfort to the bereaved. Mary touches on every aspect of the aftermath of loss, from dispelling myths surrounding the grieving process to how to deal with anger and stress, to how to handle the belongings of a lost loved one and how to help one’s children through the grieving process. Mary has also reviewed over 175 other books on the grieving process and categorized them by need in this clear, simple, helpful, and solace-filled reference. *Understanding Your Grieving Heart After a Loved One’s Death* is very highly recommended for personal, professional, and community library and grief counseling collections.”

*Midwest Book Review, December, 2001*

“Very well done – informative, supportive. I highly recommend this book to all survivors and especially to those dedicated professionals in this field.”

*M. Regina Asaro, MS, RN  
Co-Author, The Military Widow  
Psychiatric Nurse/Consultant*

“When we lose a loved one, we are in a wave of confusion and find it hard to deal with the new me – the person who has been changed unlike ever before because of death. We daily face new emotions, new kinks in our relationships and old myths that need to be discarded. How do we do it all? Author and Counselor, Mary M. McCambridge (Wong), shows us how to understand what is happening to our lives in our raw bereavement in her newest book, ***Understanding Your Grieving Heart After a Loved One's Death***. This book is a practical guide to living life after the unthinkable death of a loved one has happened to us. Mary has the gift to hold our hand and tenderly show us how.”

Alice J. Wisler, Editor  
*Tributes E-Zine Book Review, April, 2002*

“This sensitive, yet practical book goes some way to answering the many agonising questions posed by the bereft and suggests many strategies that may bring comfort during the grieving process.

Mary is an American bereavement specialist who has written several books on the many aspects of death and loss. She is quick to point out the 'uniqueness' of grief to each individual so affected and stresses that there is no normal time span and no set time frame for recovery. She goes into the well-documented stages of grief - shock, denial, despair, renewal, etc. - with great insight and compassion, yet always bringing some positive ideas to help during these stages.

The chapter on children's grief is especially illuminating, as is the section dealing with those agonising anniversaries of Christmas, Birthdays, etc. She discusses the effects of grief on marriage and also how financial worries need to be addressed during mourning. Mary ventures into the spiritual area of sorrow and speaks most movingly of how we try to make "bargains" with God.

This book has a comprehensive section on where to find help, which refers to the USA. However, I feel that similar institutions do exist in the UK and the book list is also very extensive. In conclusion, I feel that this is a useful and thoughtful book with a great deal of genuine understanding of grief and much compassion for those who grieve.”

E.B. Daniels  
*The Compassionate Friends/United Kingdom*

***Understanding Your  
Grieving Heart  
After a Loved One's Death***

***Mary M. McCambridge***

***Our Peaceful Place LLC  
Altamonte Springs, Florida***

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## *Dedication*

*For those who love them so deeply  
Miss them so desperately  
Grieve for them so despondently*

*The tears of a nation join you.*

*Remembering those who perished on  
Tuesday, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001*



*We pray blessings over the survivors of these attacks,  
the rescue workers for their brave service to our people,  
the canine rescuers for their devotion to help,  
protect and love us, and the countless volunteers  
who heard the call and answered it*

*We will not back down  
We will never forget*

*God Bless Our Great Land  
and its people*

## ***Welcome, my new friend,***

Allow me to extend to you my deepest sympathy. Experiencing a loved one's death is never easy because the relationship you shared was unique - it was not the same with any other person. And for that reason, the emotions and pain you now feel can be overwhelming.

You hurt so much because you loved so deeply. One moment you may feel stable, the next inconsolable. These varied emotions are something you may never have experienced before and these feelings of being somewhat "out of control" can be scary.

Depending on how you learned of your loved one's death, the way they died and if you were able to say goodbye, all have an impact on how you grieve. Additionally, there is no "right" way to grieve. Most of us do not know how we will cope until we confront grief for the first time.

There are many things you cannot change but some things you can. And educating yourself to what may lie ahead will definitely alleviate some unnecessary pain.

While a map gives you directions, it will not be able to steer you clear of every roadblock along the way. Sometimes a flat tire stalls your progress, sometimes an unexpected detour in the road for construction. You learn to deal with these challenges, when you are confronted with them, the best way you know how.

And so it is with grief. You will not be able to anticipate your reaction to events down the road, but you will deal with it, not feel guilty for your reaction and keep moving forward. Why? Because you have little choice. You survived your loved one. And as much as you may feel how unfair that is, it's the way it is.

So let us begin this new journey together to learn how to make the pain more bearable. Let us learn specific coping techniques from those who have walked this walk before us. Let us remember and celebrate all the wonderful times we shared with our loved one. And let us care for ourselves as we take these steps forward.

Wishing you abundant blessings and much comfort as you come to understand your grieving heart.

*Mary Mac*

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## *Chapter I*

### *Myths Behind the Grieving Process*

Most people, especially those of us who are experiencing their first deathloss, have preconceived ideas about the grieving process, usually rooted from others' experiences we've witnessed. Unless we've been exposed to a book such as this, chances are we have little knowledge, nor ever wanted any knowledge, before we actually had to deal with the death of someone close.

Logically, we expect that at some time in our life we will bury someone before we ourselves die. And, if we loved them, that loss will hurt - and hurt deeply.

If this is your first deathloss, you need to understand that no one else's previous experience with grief will be exactly the same grief journey you experience. And, if you have endured a deathloss in the past, this particular deathloss may not be anything like your previous experience. This is a completely different individual and your relationship with them has been different from the relationship you had with the individual who previously died.

Consequently, we begin by explaining what grief is *not* because you may have heard many stories about what you will feel, what you will encounter, how people will treat you and many other sordid details, which may or may not be true for you. They may have been true for that other person, but may not be true for you.

Therefore, begin this experience with an open mind.

What are the myths surrounding the grieving process?



1. ***Everyone grieves in exactly the same way.*** If this were true, there would be only one book or one tape on the grieving process and every person would follow a set of directions. It would be similar to an instruction manual that would tell you how to get from point A to point B and this was the exact direction and exact manner, and there was no deviation whatsoever.

Nothing is further from the truth. Every one of us deals with death in a different way. Your reaction may be completely different from your mother, sister or son's experience.

How you grieve depends on a number of things:

- the way you learned to cope with stress in your life before this death.
- the quality of the relationship you had with the person who was killed or died.
- the circumstances under which they died.
- the practice of your faith and ethnic customs.
- the emotional support you receive from your family and friends while you are going through the grieving process.

2. ***We handle all deathlosses in the same way.*** Again, untrue. You respond to each deathloss during your life based upon many things:

- whether this is your first deathloss or you've experienced more than your share. Many of us can recall the incapacitation and shock we felt at our first serious ***deathloss***.
- how mature you are when your loved one died. Experiencing a loved one's death when you are a child will be much different when you are in your 40's.
- how the person died. You will deal with police and district attorneys when a homicide occurs, whereas a natural death allows you to grieve without outside interruption.
- the relationship you had with them. You will grieve the death of a child quite differently than a business colleague.
- the proximity of their physical body to you when they died. A loved one killed in a car accident where you were a surviving passenger will feel quite different than your 90 year-old grandfather's death in another state.
- the quality of the relationship you had with them. If you had strained relations with a family member, perhaps their death will not affect you

nearly as much as a neighbor with whom you socialized on a regular basis. Just because you were related to an individual doesn't mean the grief will be greater.

- the geographical distance between the two of you. Chances are you will grieve more deeply for a beloved grandparent, who lived in your home since you were a child, than one who lives 3,000 miles away, with whom you had little contact throughout your lifetime.

3. ***Parents are supposed to die first.*** When a child dies or is killed, no matter whether that child was one or fifty-one, parents and grandparents struggle with the unnatural order of their death. All the hopes and dreams they had for their children are gone.

Parents endure great sadness knowing a child who dies young will not experience their sweet-sixteen or graduation. They won't walk them down the aisle at their wedding, or see grandchildren from them. They lose their future.

When we deal with the loss of a parent, we lose our past. Although we know our parents will leave us at some point, we never really are ready for their death. They provide a sense of family, a sense of security. We now become the senior generation of our family structure.

4. ***The grieving process is completed in a few months.*** And quite frankly, to some business managers, that could be a few days. But the reality is, griefwork can take upwards of 18-24 months for a natural death. For survivors whose loved ones have died in an accident, by sudden death, homicide, vehicular homicide or suicide, those timeframes can be prolonged.

Please note that there is no set timeframe; everyone's timeframe is different and it depends on the relationship you had with that person. If you had a superficial relationship, you will not, of course, need to grieve to the same extent as you would for someone whom you loved more deeply. (And chances are you wouldn't be reading this book if you have only a superficial deathloss.)

This also does not mean you grieve with the same intensity throughout this entire time. As time moves on, the grief softens, may come back intensely for shorter periods of time and then softens again. This is why many bereaved individuals call grief a roller coaster of emotions because they are not consistent.

**5. *If I get rid of everything that reminds me of my loved one, somehow this process will be easier.*** Throwing away or giving away the possessions of a loved one immediately after the funeral or shortly thereafter is not a wise move. At this stage, you are still numb and not thinking clearly. Leave these decisions until you have had an opportunity to get more control over your emotions and are able to make clearer decisions about what you would like to keep and how you would like to distribute part of their belongings. *Please do not let others make these decisions for you.* This is something you need to do in your own time, in your own privacy, when you feel more stable.

Some family members actually think if they rid the room of all pictures and memorabilia, somehow you won't be as upset. They are trying to make us feel better. They want to do what is best for us. But in that process, often times, they are really doing what is better for them - what makes *them* more comfortable.

Understand that out-of-sight does not mean out-of-mind. Belongings are very precious possessions. Having pictures out may be extremely cathartic for you. It is not uncommon to stand there and talk to the picture when you need to talk to your loved one. It's not uncommon at all. Having his belongings still in the closet so that you can smell how he smelled, and embracing the clothing will help to comfort you.

*Therefore, do not do anything with your loved one's belongings until after everyone has gone home from the funeral. Don't wash any piece of clothing or give anything away until you are stronger and thinking more clearly.*

Individuals who are not going through the grieving process often do not understand any of these things. And, before you had your first significant deathloss, neither did you. Take what they do for you as a sincere gesture, but make up your mind that you will take charge of the possessions at your own pace.

If you feel it is too difficult to have pictures or other belongings surrounding you, then safely store them away, but don't get rid of them. You will then have the option later to bring them back out or store them away permanently.

**6. *Grief will never pop back into my life once I feel stronger.*** This is definitely not true because you will experience their birthday and the anniversary of their death. As time moves along, different milestones occur. If you lost your spouse at a young age, your child will graduate and, as you sit at the ceremony with melancholy feelings, you might think, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if John were here to see this. He would have been so proud of our son." Or if your

mother died when you were a child, you might imagine her sitting next to your father at your wedding ceremony. Perhaps you decide to finally visit The Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC and you are struck by the overwhelming emotion you feel as you read your brother's name for the first time.

**7. *I can put my grief on hold until later.*** There is no doubt that many survivors, especially those with busy lives, have successfully, albeit temporarily, put their grief "on hold." But the key word here is *temporarily*. What we suppress only comes back to haunt us at some future time in our lives. Sadly, it usually occurs when we either experience another deathloss, or when some other chaotic situation happens which tilts our lives out of balance.

Do not ignore your grief as if it will go away. Although facing the pain and experience is by no means easy, it is far more healthy than trying to outrun your emotions by working more, doing more or escaping into an addictive behavior, lifestyle or relationship.

If you've experienced the anticipatory death of a loved one through illness versus a sudden death or, perhaps, the murder of a loved one, you will know that they are two totally different experiences. Getting to the realization or "acceptance" stage will take different amounts of time and energy. Additionally, those who have experienced a murder of a loved one will be the first to defend themselves from "accepting" such a death. They may "acknowledge" that the murder has occurred, accept their life now, but "accepting" how the person died is incomprehensible. Varying situations, such as these, all contribute to how you move through these rather vague "stages."

Let us now look at the flow of the grieving process, recognizing that you may bypass some stages for a time and dwell longer in others. You may work your way through one or two of the stages only to revisit an earlier stage sometime in the future.

Many people experience this. Don't be alarmed if you feel like you are not making progress. Remember, any form of stability, from one hour to the next or one day to the next, is progress. And that includes such things, which you may have considered minor in the past, like washing dishes or doing laundry. If you have the strength and will to do something today, which you didn't yesterday, you are making progress.

## *Chapter II*

### *Stages of Grief*

The stages or phases of the grieving process were first introduced by Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross to describe the emotions of a dying individual. For those surviving a loved one's death, these phases are often misunderstood because many who learn about them think they must go through all the stages in a specific order and to the same degree. This is unrealistic because:

- each deathloss is different.
- you can experience some but not all of these stages.
- you may find your experiences overlap between phases.
- you will not necessarily be on a continual upswing.
- you may spend much more time in one phase than another.
- you may revisit some of these phases after you think you've worked past them.
- should you feel yourself going backward, you don't have to start the process from the beginning.

Now, let's look at the stages/phases of grief, adjusted for the bereaved person's experience.

#### *Shock*

The dictionary defines shock as “a violent collision or impact, a violent unexpected disturbance of mental or emotional balance.” And, boy, isn't that the truth. You can feel numbness, confusion, overwhelm.

One of the most common remarks by bereaved individuals is their “outer-body experience” when people are greeting them at the funeral. You're watching the entire scene take place but you don't feel like you're a part of it.

That fog floats with you for quite a while. Don't be afraid of it. It's a protective barrier. Shock is our built-in mechanism to shield us from the overwhelming emotional impact on our mind and body.

Sometimes individuals can experience the entire funeral without crying and often claim not to feel anything. If this is you, it's okay. Your emotions will come out later; now the shock you feel is coating you with calmness and a strength you need to get through this time.

When a person has been ill for some time, survivors may feel more relief than sadness. And that's okay, too. You might move a little further in your grieving process earlier than most because you feel you've done most of it when that person was sick. Remember, you may not experience all of the phases we will speak about in the paragraphs ahead, but don't feel something is wrong with you. Although dealing with their death is of primary concern for all of us, *it is the adjustment to the loss of their presence and the interaction and relationship we had with them and expected to have with them in our future, which is truly what we are grieving.*

Others of us, who have nursed an individual for so long, are surprised that it was *now* that our loved one died. Perhaps the doctors had given them longer to live, or they took an unexpected turn for the worse and you were caught off-guard. Perhaps you were trying some new drug or an experimental surgery, which didn't work. You, too, can be in shock that all your hopes have been short-circuited.

During the beginning of your grieving process, you may find yourself at a variety of places. You may feel completely drained, with no energy to do anything, or you may be the strong one, handling all the details and being there for everyone else in the family. You might be somewhere in between.

But as this protective bubble wears thin and the shock wears off, the reality that your loved one is dead is hard to bear. Harder to bear than in the beginning of your grief when you 'floated' through your pain.

### ***Denial of their Death***

When we are still in shock, it is common to be in denial that the death has even occurred. Upon receiving the news that a loved one is dead, many will immediately say, "That isn't so. That can't be true. Tell me this isn't happening."

It is extremely difficult, especially in sudden deaths, to comprehend that a loved one has died. Most of us do not live expecting doom to cast its ugly head each day of our lives. We don't say, "Well, I wonder who will die today?" Rather, we'd like to believe all our precious family and friends will somehow outlive us. So when unexpected tragic news comes our way, we are naturally not prepared for it.

To help our minds better understand what is happening, we deny the news. You may say things like, "No, this can't be happening. She's not dead. I know she's not dead. She's just at college." Or, "He's away on vacation. I know he'll come back." We think, "This is just a dream. I know I'm going to wake up and this will have been a complete nightmare. Everything will get back to normal tomorrow."

As the shock and numbness begin to wear off, we find ourselves reliving the death, bargaining with God to return them, yearning for just one more touch because we miss that person so very much.

Some of the most painful times come when we allow our minds and hearts to consider that our loved one may not be returning to us. And in that process, we go through the following:

— Disbelief. This is when we feel the need to relive the experience again and again. You find yourself telling others what is going on, how this occurred in your life, how the person died and every single detail surrounding the circumstances of their death. The reason you do this is because retelling your story, while it makes it no less painful, does make it more real for you. We still can't believe it ourselves.

— Bargaining. Bargaining is a difficult process because it usually includes regret. We bargain with God. We say, "You know, God, if you will just bring her back to me, I'll go to church for the rest of my life. I'll do anything you want. Please just let me wake up tomorrow and let this have been a horrible nightmare."

— Questioning. We ask the "whys." "Why did this happen? Why am I going through this? Why did this happen to her? Why did she die this way?" There are no satisfactory answers to these questions, but you have to ask them. It's a process which you should not dismiss. You need to continue to ask them, until you come to a place where you are more

accepting of the fact that your loved one will not return. But understand you may never have answers to your questions. (We will touch more on this in Spiritual Challenges.)

We go through the “if-only’s” and improperly blame ourselves for something we had no control over. “If only I hadn’t let her drive. If only I had bought her a train ticket. If only I had been there for her, perhaps this or that wouldn’t have happened.” Although it is hard now to release any regret or guilt you feel as far as your participation or lack thereof in the events of their death, you must release yourself from these feelings over time as they will only keep you stuck here unnecessarily.

— Yearning. Words cannot express the pain you feel for a chance to hold them, touch them, hug them, talk to them and tell them how much you love them. There is nothing wrong with talking to their pictures, hugging a stuffed animal to console yourself, embracing their unlaundered clothing and smelling their scent still on the garments or wearing their two-sizes-bigger-than-you pajamas to bed.

— Anger. This emotion can raise its head many different times during your griefwork. Some survivors are angry immediately after the death - “How could you take your own life? How could you do this to us?” Others feel anger later on - “I thought I would be alright on my own. Why did you leave me? I feel so incompetent to make all these decisions alone.”

The healthiest anger is anger that is dealt with. (We’ll talk more about anger in subsequent chapters.)

## ***Despair***

There is a tremendous void at this point. You have been slowly realizing your loved one is not coming back. That hole in your heart is so difficult to deal with. You miss them so desperately. You feel that part of you has also died. You wander aimlessly, trying to find your way. You become disorganized and confused. Nothing seems to matter anymore. You may start to question all aspects of your life and its purpose. “What does this all mean anyway? Why am I going through all this? Why can’t I just snap out of this?”



Sadly, many of your friends and family may be waiting for you to “get over it by now” and expect you to be “back to normal.” But what is normal, anyway? Normal to you, now, will probably be completely different than it was before your loved one's death.

If you find yourself unable to speak with anyone who will listen, it may be time to search out someone to validate your pain, fears and tears. Visit [www.askmarymac.com](http://www.askmarymac.com) for information which will help you.

The sorrow you feel hurts desperately. It may take many months, even several years for certain deaths, to feel more stable emotionally, all the while working and attending to your family. Slowly you start to think of making plans for your future without the one you love so much. These decisions can be hard and scary, but at some point, so necessary.

### ***Renewal***

There can be a tendency toward guilt when you begin to feel stronger and venture out to a new life without your loved one. But this is inevitable if we are to grow and move forward.

Too many survivors feel unworthy of going on and living their life when their spouse, child, or parent are no longer living and cannot share it with them. Because their loved one died too soon, or first, the survivor somehow convinces themselves that their lives are now over as well.

Don't let this happen to you. There is a reason you are still here. There is work for you to do. People whose lives you will affect for the better; changes only you can bring about. Don't fall for this lie.

You are entitled to feel happiness again, no matter what your grieving process may bring. Please remember that. There will come a time when you will laugh again, sing again, feel joy again and not feel guilty. Work toward that time. Be kind to yourself.

## *Chapter III*

### *Manifestations of Grief*

#### *Emotional Challenges*

We all have feelings of sadness, guilt, anxiety, loneliness, irritability and overwhelm. Sometimes, we have a desire to blame others. We might feel anger and embarrassment if our loved one was murdered or died by suicide. We feel self-doubt, a lower self-esteem, a sense of being out of control. We can experience everything from hopelessness and helplessness to feelings of victimization and absolute giddiness.

None of us like to experience these emotions because they make us feel uncomfortable, uneasy, uncertain. You may think to yourself, "Abstracts are not for me - I want to feel in control." And, often, this frustration is one of the worst parts about grief since you no longer do feel in control.

Another emotion you may feel is relief. Relief, often times, brings feelings of guilt. We believe we don't have a right to feel this way. But you need to know that it is not uncommon for survivors to feel relief after they have cared for or arranged for the care of an individual who had a terminal illness or had been ill for an extended period of time.

In time, you will release this guilt. Your emotional and physical contributions to your loved one have been exhausted. You need to rest and recharge. It is natural for you to need to reflect on a renewed sense of freedom and time. You should value your sacrifice, knowing it is now okay to relax. Try not to beat yourself up about this.

One of the most compelling feelings is the inability to tolerate individuals who take things for granted or are ungrateful for what and whom they have in their lives. I've never met a bereaved individual who didn't tell me how they now see life in a completely different way. Things that were important to them before, no longer are. And when they encounter situations where people are getting upset over what they consider ridiculously fixable, they have no tolerance.

Once you've experienced the death of someone very close to you, you recognize the value of every day. I remember, during many grieving periods, asking myself how there could still be people out there who never had a major problem in their life bigger than their car, house or job. I'd think to myself, "I've had more than my share. Why don't they have any pain like this?" They would be consumed with rage over what I perceived as trivial problems, while I was the one feeling "if only they knew what *real* problems were." If you're feeling this way, you are in good company. Intolerance to what we perceive as the petty problems of others is normal, normal, normal.

The solution to this is simple - don't socialize with such shallow people. Friends and family who recognize your pain but still find a way to discuss their overwhelming, trivial problems are more selfish than you thought. Other friends like this will simply exit your life shortly after the funeral because they can't handle it. Grief is messy, a long process, and it is just not for them. This is when you find out who your real friends are. I did. You will. It's a fact. And when the dust settles, a whole new group of friends will appear and the shallow ones will fade into the sunset - which turns out to be a blessing.

## ***1. Dealing with Stress***

Dealing with stress is one of the most important ingredients in successfully moving toward resolution of your grief. Perhaps you've seen family, friends or business colleagues who didn't handle stress well and found themselves in emergency rooms holding their chest. Or worse, encountering major surgery or death.

Stress itself can kill. Your job is to learn how to release stress with the goal toward a saner, more balanced lifestyle. Especially now, with so much inner turmoil wreaking havoc on your body, it is so important that you recognize the need for balance. Learning what to say "no" to and when to say it will help you function in a calm environment, even when chaos may be breaking loose around

you. Set boundaries, especially now. This is not the time to let non-bereaved folks walk all over you with talk about their wants and needs.

Let's look at ways to alleviate and reduce stress:

—Exercise. I know, I know. You're probably saying, "Did she have to bring up *that* word?" Yes, yes. The reason is not so much to worry about your physical size, (although that is a wonderful by-product) but rather to get you moving, which will help reduce the possibility of depression. When we sit too long and continually reflect upon our pain, instead of doing something with our body, we can easily fall into a depressed state. I don't want this to happen to you.

Making special time for exercise, especially when you are dealing with such pain, is valuable. Even though you feel like you want to lie in bed all day, it is important that you move, get outside and get some fresh air.

If all you do is walk outside your door and breathe in the air, or walk a block down the street and back, it is far better than had you stayed in bed all day. In the beginning, this may be significant for you. The whole purpose is to get your body moving.

If you will do this for me every day, within a few weeks you'll feel stronger and walk longer and farther. Maybe now it will be three blocks, then four, and before you know it you'll be able to walk a mile. You'll start to look forward to this. It will be your time for yourself. And while you are grieving, you really need that.

— When you rise in the morning, lift all the blinds and draw the curtains to bring in the light. This sounds like such a little thing, but when you feel blue you tend to want to shut out the world. And when you open them, the sunlight will come in and it will help lift your mood as well. Even if it's a darker day, at least the light will come in - much better than having a dull, dark room to depress you more.

— Recognize and acknowledge all the feelings that you are experiencing right now. The more we try to restrict and deny what is really happening in our emotions, the more stress we build. And the whole point is to try to reduce unnecessary stress. We had plenty to deal with before our loved one died, now we are coupled with even more.

— Plan an adequate and nutritious diet. It is very easy to become the junk food queen or king when you have limited energy to cook and prepare meals. Junk food will not serve your body well, especially now. You need to build your strength through good food.

Try to be conscious of what you are eating. Because we feel so bad, we don't worry about what is going into our mouths. We just pick up anything. When our immune system is already broken down, it is even more of a challenge. We need to consider our diet, build ourselves up and stay in a healthy mode.

Consider reducing or eliminating sugar, white flour and caffeine, which is found in coffee, chocolate, tea and sodas. Use decaffeinated products instead. Stay away from processed foods. My rule is if I can't pronounce the ingredients, it shouldn't go into my body. Use dairy products sparingly. Reduce your intake of breads, pastas and other carbohydrates. Choose chicken and turkey over pork and beef. Eat abundant amounts of fruits and vegetables.

When you do not eat well, it takes your body extra energy to digest these foods, which gives you less of the energy you need to heal. Eat foods that will support your body and mind.

— Some people think vitamins and supplements are useless and even some doctors, who are afraid their services won't be needed by healthy, informed consumers, will tell you vitamins and supplements are unnecessary. I strongly disagree. We need to do everything in our power, especially with the high cost of healthcare, to support our body.

When our loved one dies, our physical bodies react to the strain and can decrease the strength of our immune system. During less stressful times, we had already built up toxins in our system from the pollutants in the air, pesticides used to preserve food, and through antibiotics in our foods and from medication. Compound a perhaps weakened immune system with the stress of a loved one's death, and we can be that much more susceptible to illness.

Enlist the help of a holistic doctor and nutritionist who will assist you in caring for your entire or whole body (thus the name holistic medicine). Their skill at helping you build a strong immune system will be worth any cost insurance may not pay for.

— Listen to comforting and soothing music each day. Pick out a good radio station or some tapes or CDs in classical, jazz, spiritual or other soothing

genres. A favorite place to calm your soul is Praise in the Night, a syndicated radio program. Airing overnight, it's a great comfort for those who cannot sleep. Visit their website at [www.pitn.org](http://www.pitn.org) to find a station near you or listen directly from their website.

Choosing CDs, which have rhythms of the ocean, or other equally wonderful sounds of nature, can also comfort. You want to develop a peace-filled environment. You may find that instrumental is less risky than songs with words. But, ultimately, you will hear that one perfect song, "your song," or some sentimental song which will only bring you sadness, start the tears to flow and bring you on an unsettling trip down memory lane.

While you may find soothing is good right now, don't dismiss the need to play loud, fun music where you can dance and feel joyful once again. When you can handle it, uplifting music is far superior to slow, memory-filled music. You will find there is a place for both. Don't be a slave to either format. There will actually be times when that soft, memory-filled music will help you cry out your pain and release many pent-up emotions, which you may not have otherwise been able to release. And even though this process can be painful, wise individuals know it is far healthier to go through the pain, experiencing all its facets, than to mask it as if nothing has happened.

— Balance work and play. If we work or play too hard, neither will support us. Men, in particular, tend to overdo work because it keeps them from coming home to the reality that their loved one is no longer there. It's very easy to fool yourself when you are at work. You keep yourself busy and somehow you feel stronger in this chaotic state. But intentionally staying busy by developing more and more work for yourself only puts your feelings of grief on hold that much longer. Eventually you will have to deal with this pain.

Better to understand that facing the pain will ultimately support your work life better. It will help keep you in balance. It is easier to deal with significant pain little by little than all at once when down the road you crash. Take the necessary time now. Don't be embarrassed to ask for time off. There are many ways to get more time for yourself. Perhaps leaving early each day, taking half days on Friday, hiring out someone to do the lawn and other household chores so you can spend more time together with your family on the weekends. Use your creativity.

Remember, you can never replace this time with your family. They need for you to physically be around them when crisis occurs. Showing up four months from now will not help. They need you now. Find the courage to develop balance and set your priorities. Jobs are just one part of your entire life. You can get another job, but this is the only life you have.

— Work toward developing your sense of humor again. Many who are grieving develop the misunderstanding that they are not allowed to feel happiness again because their loved one is not here to feel happiness with them. I've been asked, "How can I possibly feel happy again when my loved one is in the ground?" We feel we don't have "the right."

You may even catch yourself laughing one day and look around wondering if anyone saw you. You may think, "How can I be laughing - this isn't right." But each one of us, in our own timing, will release these feelings of guilt when we acknowledge that our loved one wouldn't want us to go around somber the rest of our lives. They'd want us to live our life, even without them. And slowly, as you settle this within yourself, you give yourself permission to feel happiness again.

## ***2. Loneliness***

Loneliness is another common issue accompanying grief, which can be difficult to deal with. Widows and widowers are especially vulnerable here. You may have spent 15, 25, 40 or more years with the same person and now that person is no longer here. There are ways to help yourself by recognizing when this feeling comes and goes.

You may recognize that you feel lonely during certain times of the day or perhaps one particular day, like Sunday, for instance. Carefully register that in your mind and then find activities or ask friends to come and visit you during those vulnerable times.

It is important to develop friendships with those who can be called upon during these difficult hours to become your support system. Be truthful. Tell them that you are having a difficult time right now and really miss having people around. Would they mind your calling them around this time of the week or day?

If you've experienced your spouse's death, you may also notice that when you are in the company of your married friends, you feel like a third wheel. You face the dual dilemma of being happy to be in their company, while experiencing a twinge of awkwardness. Don't let this stop you from socializing with couples who truly care about you. Be honest with your friends. If they love you, they'll be considerate of your feelings.

It can be very easy to isolate yourself because it's just too painful to mingle with others who don't truly understand. If these individuals are your sole support system, one of your first steps may be to attend a support group that focuses on your specific type of bereavement. These are people who have experienced very similar pain. Take the time to research a group for yourself, beginning with the resources in the back of this book.

Now, I'm not saying join for life. I'm saying that support groups are wonderful stepping-stones back into the flow of life. When you are so sensitive and need to be totally understood, these are wonderful places for the transition. Ultimately recognize that it is more important for you to be around people than to be alone.

And, on the flip side, there will be many times when you want to be alone so you can do your griefwork. You need some quiet time, even when it's a painful growth time. It is here where you will learn so much about yourself, your courage, your strength, how far you have come since the funeral.

Try to surround yourself with those most supportive of your moving forward. It is just as easy to get trapped with survivors who wish to remain in a "pity-party" mode. Everyone's entitled to their pity-parties as they grieve. But you don't want to get stuck in that rut. Too many people walk around with an invisible sign that says, "Go ahead, ask me how bad I feel." They have succumbed to the comfortableness of the spirit of grief, a place you don't want to languish in forever.

In the beginning, everyone is there for you. The week of the funeral and usually the week after, there is so much confusion - people staying over from out of town, food from neighbors, cards, e-mail, concern from most people in your circle of friends, etc. But a few days or weeks later, you may find yourself looking at the empty house, wondering how you're going to live the rest of your life like this now. You ask yourself, "How am I going to get through this? There aren't enough people consistently around me."



So, I want you to become involved in something. You must have something to look forward to. Whether that's a bereavement support group each week for six or eight weeks and follow up sessions once each month, whether you baby sit for your grandchildren, whether you take a class for a favorite hobby, or walk the mall in the morning with others - it's important to DO something each day.

Perhaps you'll take a part-time job in the community library or community agency. Volunteer some time to the Red Cross or other worthy group. Perhaps even a group tutoring young children or volunteering in the local or school library.

When you take the focus off yourself and your problems, you will find yourself healing and happier.

### ***3. Dealing with Fear***

Fear may be one of the most difficult emotions you experience, but with time it can be overcome. For the widowed, it may be the fear of being alone. Fear that you'll never love again. Fear that no one will ever love you. Fear that you'll be rejected.

If you've experienced a miscarriage, you might feel you'll never have children in your life. If you've lost your only child, you wonder who will care for you as you age. If you've lost a parent, you may wonder how you'll move forward without their support, encouragement and the security their presence brought to your life.

I'm sure you would agree that everyone deals with fear. Those who conquer it and move past it succeed to greater levels than those who allow it to control them. This can be easier said than done, when grief is involved, because sometimes fear can seem totally overwhelming. But, at these times, because of our sensitivity, we conjure up so many possibilities of failure and fear in our minds that we sometimes make it worse than it really is.

Remember, fear is "False Evidence Appearing Real." When you are overwhelmed, write down all the things that you are fearful about. Break them down into small parts. If they are activities or things you must do, make them small "bite-sized" pieces - small activities which will not seem so overwhelming.

By doing this, you will feel a sense of accomplishment, that sense of success you are building toward so the full project will be completed. Don't be afraid. You are moving out of your comfort zone so, of course, you feel fear.

For encouragement, think back to times in your past when you went out of your comfort zone. You were a little afraid but you still did it anyway. And when you think of those instances, remember how you felt, remember that you indeed took the action and completed the task. You did it anyway. You faced fear in the eye and still moved ahead. And if you're like me, after it was all over, you secretly wondered why you got in such a tizzy over it. It actually wasn't as bad as you had conjured up in your mind.

You did it then and you still can do it now. So...GO FOR IT - DO IT IN SPITE OF YOUR FEAR!

#### ***4. Anger***

Not every bereaved person experiences anger surrounding a loved one's death, but those who do sometimes misplace their anger at the wrong person.

People can become angry at

- the person who died or was killed.
- the circumstances surrounding their death.
- the fact that they weren't with them when they died (and the sense of feeling out of control that this brings).
- the physicians and other medical personnel who took care of their loved one prior to their death.
- surviving family members and what they did or didn't do.
- the person who killed their loved one or the justice system which didn't prevail
- and finally - themselves for what they think they did or didn't do before or at the time of their loved one's death.

You may deal with anger toward many of these individuals, most beyond your control. You may be angry with people who have treated you badly in your grief, said the wrong things, did the wrong things, were inconsiderate and didn't treat you well.

Some survivors become angry before the death, perhaps at a doctor or other relative regarding whether lifesaving measures should or shouldn't be used. Others of us become angry after the death, maybe over unscrupulous acts of a funeral director who did not have our financial health in mind. Still others of us become angry later, after the burial, perhaps by offensive words we heard while in our fragile state, or because we felt they did or didn't accommodate our needs as we expected they would.

You might be angry with the person who caused the death of your loved one, whether it was a drunk driver, a murderer, or perhaps a doctor who did not perform effectively. You might be angry in general that you are the survivor. Maybe you're angry because you have to go through this alone, without your loved one or because your support system doesn't live near you.

You might be angry with God. How is He involved in this? What part did He or didn't He play in this?

You might even be angry with yourself for what you did or didn't do, did or didn't say. And you have regrets about that. You feel that you really didn't get a chance to finalize things with your loved one. They were taken - died too soon. You didn't get a chance to say goodbye. And you're angry with yourself because you thought you would have that opportunity at some time in the future, so you didn't take it when you had the chance. Never did you think that *this* was your last chance to say and do what you wished you had done. How could that have happened?

It is okay and natural to be angry with someone who has abandoned you - even in death. Especially if their death has caused a whole host of situations you now need to deal with, which you didn't have to deal with when they were alive.

### ***Acceptable ways to express our anger***

— Exercising. The more vigorous the activity, the more frustration is released. You just need to move your body every day. Take a simple walk to start, and then keep going.

— Scribbling out and drawing things on paper.

— Writing down on paper, in letter form, all the anger you are feeling toward the person who died and all the anger that has developed since their death.

This will be a great release for you, even if you feel somewhat guilty telling them all your feelings in such a letter. Then tear up, burn or release those letters on a balloon somewhere serene - a park, a lake, the cemetery, the ocean.

— Talking about your anger with someone, even if it is an anonymous hotline volunteer or local bereavement counselor.

— Yelling in the shower, the car or some other private place. My husband told me how, after his daughter was murdered, he would scream in the car because it was a private place where nobody would ever know or hear his pain.

—Playing sports. Playing the piano.

— Taking a towel and screaming into it.

— Beating a pillow with a backscratcher or throwing it up against a wall many times will unleash that unspent energy. You need to get that out of you.

— Visiting a gym or installing a punching bag in the garage. Allowing yourself to expend this anger until exhaustion is sometimes what you need.

Anger, which builds and is not constructively released, can lead to many additional problems. For young children, it can lead to temper tantrums and bouts of screaming. For school-aged children, it can lead to difficulties with school studies and the inability to connect with their peers. For teenagers, it may be peer pressure to just numb themselves from the pain with drugs, alcohol and premature, irresponsible sexual relationships in a hope that someone will listen, understand and comfort them.

For adults, it can lead to serious illnesses, such as heart attack, stroke and other life threatening illness. The inability or choice not to effectively communicate can suppress our immune system. Some adults mask their pain with alcohol and drugs, either prescription or illegal. Others use promiscuous sex and risky behaviors to disguise their pain, which will not support them but instead only lead to other long-term problems - problems that will complicate their pain and only cause them more anguish.

So, please, don't dismiss your anger. Work on whatever anger you are feeling. Work it out, write it out, punch it out, scream it out. But whatever you do, get it out.

## 5. *Regrets*

No matter how close you were to the person whose death you are now grieving, you may feel some sort of regret over what you might have done differently when they were alive or what you could have experienced together had they lived.

The “if-only’s”, and what we call the “would-a, could-a, should-a’s” can paralyze you if you let them. “If only I had done this, if only I had done that,” may be the record played over and over in your mind.

All of us live with some regret and guilt regarding the way we treated the person who died or was killed. You might have been the most supportive person throughout their illness, but you still wind up wondering what more you could have done. You find yourself feeling that you didn’t spend enough time with them or didn’t do a particular something they would have appreciated.

You think maybe another operation would have worked. On the other hand, you think perhaps you shouldn’t have agreed to the operation they did have that led to their death.

You must remember - you made decisions, which you felt were the most viable, from the choices you had *when you made them*. You cannot take them back and you cannot feel guilty about the outcome. Even if you had the same decision to make today, there is no certainty that the outcome would be different. Please remember that and draw comfort from it.

Next, go to the park, the lake, the ocean, the cemetery with that pad of paper. Can you bring the walkman to play soft instrumental music while sitting on a beautiful blanket with a soothing drink? Write a letter about all the things that are bothering you in regards to their death. How it happened, what choices you made, what you wish you could change, what you are struggling with.

You can do a lot of things within that letter. It is cathartic for your own benefit because it dumps all that pain out of your gut and you can now see it on paper.

I encourage you to take this very important step when you are ready. It definitely hinders us from moving forward in our grieving process if we are constantly feeling badly about ourselves, about a situation that we perceive we could or couldn't have changed yet still feel so angry and guilt-ridden about.

When finished, you have many choices similar to the other letters you have written to release your feelings, which we discussed in previous chapters. You can bury these letters at the cemetery, attach them to a balloon, burn them, or simply add them to your journal.

The process is to let it all go. Release all those feelings that are causing you to stay stuck.

## ***6. Depression***

You may find you go through mild to somewhat heavy episodes of depression during your grieving process. Anyone who leads you to believe you will never feel depressed or blue is simply sugarcoating it.

Tips for keeping depression in check:

— Remember, your emotional ups and downs are to be expected. You may have a feeling of being on a roller coaster. Sometimes you feel like you're at the peak, other times in the pit. You may find yourself saying, "Stop the world; I want to get off."

In the beginning, you may feel a zigzag of emotion. Up and down. Up and down. One minute you're happy, the next minute you're sad. There may be times when you can't control those emotions and it gets you very rattled. This is normal and most of us go through this.

As time goes on, instead of our emotions fluctuating in steep peaks and valleys, they start to soften and become like hilly terrain. Now the peaks start to round off at the edges and the minute-by-minute survival has decreased. It now becomes an hour-by-hour, or day-by-day, or week-by-week survival. The edges become softer on the roller coaster ride. Now thoughts of our loved one enter our every waking moment, but later we will think less often of them.

— One of the most healing effects is for you to keep interested in other people and *their* problems. Now you might think this is absolutely idiotic for me to say, but I've found for myself (and heard from many people whom I have counseled one-on-one and in support groups) that when you take the focus off your pain, you are less likely to experience a severe depression. You instead focus on someone else's problem.

Now this doesn't mean you have fooled yourself into believing you are fine; rather, it takes the focus off your pain and provides assistance in some form to another.

Well, what does that mean? Perhaps you'll go the local hospital and help in the children's ward. Maybe it means doing volunteer clerical work at the church. Or perhaps it's helping sort clothing at Good Will. Maybe you'll baby sit occasionally for someone juggling family and career, perhaps once a week or twice a month. What better way to memorialize your loved one than to help another family?

To keep balance, don't overdo it. If you go to the other extreme, using every free minute to help others, you run the risk of convincing yourself that you are just fine and your grieving is over. If you play that game with your head too soon, you will do a disservice to your mental health. So, slowly introduce yourself to outside projects, while still keeping time for yourself to reflect on your emotional needs.

— Another fantastic way to release pain is through journaling. Buy an enticingly beautiful journal and write down your innermost thoughts. Many times, when you're going through grief, you'll have sleepless nights. This is the perfect opportunity to release all those emotions that seem like they will explode within you at some inopportune moment. Maybe some have spilled out already.

The wonderful thing about journaling is you get to dump out all these fears, frustrations, feelings, anger and guilt onto blank sheets of paper, which strangely become your friend and confidante. You can tell your journal anything. All the pain you have bottled up inside can be released through one free-flowing pen. There is nothing more freeing than writing it all down, every inch of the agony, because when it's now safely on paper, it's no longer inside of you. And if you do this on a regular basis, a few pages each day, you will feel a sense of peace. You will no longer be carrying around all that pain - you've now released it, at least for today.

As you move forward through the grief journey, you will be able to read what you wrote and see how far you've come. And that will encourage you to move forward at a more constructive pace. You will see that there is actually progress here. And that's important.

## ***Physical Challenges***

Whether we wish to admit it, when we grieve, our physical bodies are also affected. Here are just some of the many symptoms we may experience to differing degrees:

— Crying, crying, crying. The reason I say this is because most of us have bouts of crying. (Okay, so this is more so for the women than men.) At times, periods of intense sobbing and wailing overcome us. Buckets of tears can also come at the most inappropriate moments, which may lead to embarrassment.

Even so, there are so many benefits to crying. It's a cleansing, a catharsis, which we really need. Please try not to restrict yourself by not crying when you need to.

Other symptoms include:

- Dry mouth.
- A lump in your throat.
- Shortness of breath.
- Stomach aches.
- Nausea.
- Tightening in the chest.
- Poor appetite.
- Increased appetite.
- Body aches, stiffness of joints and muscles.
- Dizziness or faintness.
- Extreme fatigue, decreased energy levels.
- Restlessness, jitteriness.
- Exhaustion.
- Inability to fall asleep at night.
- Sleeping all day and night.
- Eating too much.
- Not eating enough.



— Comforting yourself by rocking back and forth or side to side in a stationary chair.

The different levels of physical manifestations can be far-reaching. It is imperative that you see your doctor as soon as you can. He or she needs to know that you are going through the grieving process.

I wish I could tell you for certain that your physician will know a great deal about the grieving process. Chances are, he or she's had very limited education on this subject. Most medical school curriculums do not teach about the grieving process, although this is beginning to change. And this is encouraging.

A physician's primary concern is to keep people alive. As such, he or she is not especially skilled at helping people die or in comforting the survivors after a patient's death. So, while physicians may not be the best choice to help us emotionally, they can help us physically.

One of the most difficult things for me to see, among members of our support groups, was just how many members simply neglected their bodies while they were going through the grieving process. Because they felt so bad emotionally, they didn't care for themselves physically. You need to realize both go hand-in-hand.

Have your doctor give you a complete physical check-up. They may recommend a mild anti-depressant for a short period of time to stabilize you when you need it most. You should never be embarrassed if you need such medication to help you get through. Also, beware of taking very strong medication if you feel you don't need it. Heavy meds can leave you incapable of functioning and mask your feelings. Doing so will only slow down your grieving process and take you that much longer to deal with your true emotions.

Remember, you are not superman. Don't act like it. The medication may get you past the roughest times. And later, you'll see you won't need it any longer.

As for the men... I have unfortunately seen so many men who completely neglect their health, coupled by not participating in the grieving process. They think they are made of steel. Most won't cry or allow themselves any outlet. These same men have succumbed to stroke, heart attack, diabetes, even their own

premature death. They choose to go around it, under it and over it. They bypass it every way and it affects them physically.

Whether male or female, don't let this happen to you. Get to the doctor and nutritionist shortly after your loved one's death and develop a plan for yourself.

## ***Social Challenges***

After the death of a loved one, many things can change. In addition to your grief, you may also be confronted with the "death" or end of friendships, communities, property, etc.

Here are just a handful of situations that you may encounter and might add to your grief:

— When a loved one dies, your circle of friends may diminish. Many do not know what to do or say and aren't willing to subject themselves to your pain because it's too messy and complicated. Most of these friends have yet to experience a serious deathloss of their own, or they have had their share and can't mentally deal with your problems too right now. They may attend the funeral, send a card, and you'll never hear from them again. Others, who may be around you because geography (neighbors) or employment (colleagues on your floor) demands it, may pay their respects but suddenly can't find the time to have lunch or coffee with you any longer for fear you might want to talk about your pain and they just don't want to get involved.

— When a spouse dies, those with whom you played bridge don't call as much since they need even-numbered players. And female friends forget to call, as they are now cautious that you will be attracted to their husbands, or worse yet, that their husbands may be attracted to you.

— Perhaps you now need to live with children far away from the community you called home for decades. You feel uprooted. Your precious home is for sale and the additional loss of your home and all its possessions, not long after your spouse's death, makes it that much more difficult to bear.

— You hate the fact that others need to care for you more than before. There is a reluctance to ask for help - a determination to stay independent.

— Decisions are being made for you, and you aren't communicating your needs adequately. Some bereaved individuals, especially if they're older, become withdrawn because of their new greater dependency on others and feel they are often misunderstood. If your spouse has died, it is the good intentions of your children to help Mom or Dad by having you either live with them or close by. But many times, your needs and desires aren't fully considered. Since you don't want to harm the relationship you have with your children, you might just go along with decisions they make on your behalf. And this can lead to underlying animosity and resentment, since your true desire is to remain independent.

Communication is key here. Unless finances are a major concern, try not to make any changes too soon after the funeral. We don't think as clearly when under such shock and stress. Leave major decisions for a number of months down the road, even a year later. Everyone will be thinking more clearly by then, and you and your children will have had the time to consider many more options than everyone thought were first available.

You'll also see who truly has your best interests at heart by how compassionate they are after your spouse has died. Which family members are genuinely interested in your well-being and want what is best for you? Who considers and listens to what *you* want?

— Because people avoid us, we suffer from rejection, either real or perceived. People just don't understand what we are going through, and we are often unable to explain it ourselves. Other people want to help but don't know what to do for us, and we are unable to communicate what it is we need from them. This makes everyone feel uncomfortable and, until you have a better grasp of exactly what will help you, it is best to simply communicate that to your family and friends. "Right now I just feel overwhelming confusion and pain. I don't know what you can do for me. Perhaps you can just be here in the house with me. We don't have to talk. Just be here with me. Your presence will comfort me." That may just be enough for now.

— We feel a sense of isolation and alienation, and we believe we need to find distractions from the intensity of the grief. We try to stay busy. We over-commit to activities and become workaholics or volunteeraholics - stay busy, do more, do more. We work later; we get up earlier. We try to stay away from our family. We try to do whatever it takes to keep moving, keep moving, keep moving as if, somehow, we are going to outrun this grief.

Well, unfortunately, you will not outrun your grief. You may cause to delay it by all that action and all that busyness but, somewhere along the way, it will creep back into your life and you'll need to deal with it then. Take a step back and ask, "What exactly am I doing? What am I trying to accomplish by working so feverishly, by taking on more at work, or more activities with friends, or even in my own garage?" Are you doing everything you can to keep yourself out of the house, away from people? If this is you, you are running away from yourself, your pain and your griefwork. No matter how painful, you must slow down, allow yourself to feel the pain, and then you can begin to heal.

— Adults who have lost adult siblings often wonder why their grief is not as well respected as other types of grief. They've told me how friends and business colleagues dismiss the pain of losing a brother or sister. No one is really clear why this happens, but it does, and you are not alone. Seek out general bereavement groups where you will find others who have had similar grief experiences and also need to talk to those who understand.

— Families who have survived a homicide frequently tell me how they are judged for the way their loved one died. Somehow it was either the survivor's or the victim's fault. But, it is neither. The fact is, no one should be murdered, no matter what they do or where they live or who they associate with. Victims are always someone's parent, sibling, spouse or child, and their families grieve and grieve deeply. They endure the suspicion of police and district attorneys, the countless hours working on the case, and the uncertainty of plea bargains and trials. They seek justice above all else. Remember, it is the murderer's fault. The blame belongs with them - only them.

— Families who have experienced a loved one's suicide bear much guilt over what they could have done differently, even when they ultimately place responsibility on their loved one who chose his or her death.

Homicide and suicide survivors are among the most difficult bereavements. And there will be judgment sometimes from the most unsuspecting places. We realize neighbors, friends, business colleagues and even family will always have their opinions. And they will usually judge and add their unnecessary two cents when they don't understand the facts.

Sometimes we'll take the time to explain; most times we won't bother. Remember, you will never change their minds and you shouldn't waste your precious energy and your quest for acknowledgment of this tragedy on their ignorant words or deeds. Let it be. Work on yourself and your family's needs.

Often, no explanation will suffice so don't even try. Instead, spend time with people who want to ease your pain because they understand - new friends you'll find who truly know how you feel. You'll find them in bereavement support groups.

As you can see, there will always be someone whose advice you can do without. Take the good - discard the rest. Your goals are for inner calmness and the ability to help yourself and your family through this process in the way that works best for you.

For those family and friends who show themselves as being true helpers on your journey, communicate your needs lovingly. They will listen and respect what you need.

## ***Intellectual Challenges***

Earlier we discussed how we go through denial and a sense of non-reality. We feel confusion, like our brain is fuzzy. We have an inability to concentrate at times. We get preoccupied and find ourselves daydreaming and staring off into space. We can experience hallucinations, whereby we may be sitting somewhere and feel like we can actually see our loved ones in the room with us. For those who have experienced this, although it may be startling, it often brings a great sense of comfort.

A few years after my husband's daughter was murdered, we were invited to the home of Luisa, whose daughter, Maria, had also been murdered and was a member of our support group. As we enjoyed tea that Sunday afternoon, the front door slowly opened. As we all looked up, our hostess replied, "Oh, that's Maria coming in to join us." And it was obvious how comforting this was for Luisa. Some may find this unsettling, but not her guests. It was her way of acknowledging her daughter's presence into the room. She told us later that ever since Maria was killed this had been happening on a regular basis. She would be sitting in the room, reading or knitting, and all of a sudden the inner door would unlock and slowly swing open while the screen door would stay in place, and she gained great comfort from that.

One of the first gifts my husband gave me when we were dating was a small music box. Years after Angela's death, we would be having dinner and suddenly it would start playing - and I hadn't wound it in months. Each time

something like that would happen, we'd both look at each other and say, "I guess Angela is saying hello."

Things like this do happen and please don't be afraid of them because they can bring you great comfort. You only need to be aware that some folks will think you've absolutely lost it, so it's best to share such joys only with true believers.

We also have the need to reminisce about our loved ones, to talk about them. To discuss all the different things we did with them at one time or another. Sometimes family members don't want to discuss them or say their names, and you have to let them know that it is important to you that they use your loved one's name when they speak about him. And, yes, they should speak about him often.

You need to tell them, "Just because I speak about Dad through the tears doesn't mean that I am not happy to discuss our life together." Family and friends sometimes act like our loved ones never existed when they don't discuss them. It becomes an almost taboo subject because they are afraid it would bring you too much pain if they were to start a conversation about him. You need to help them understand that when they talk about him, it brings you joy remembering the happy times.

You have a desire to rationalize or intellectualize your feelings about the loss. Sometimes you are not at a level where you can say, "My child was murdered," or "My child took his life." So you might say things like "when the accident happened," or "when they died." That makes it a little bit less real for you, a little bit less painful. You haven't gotten to the point where you can say what truly happened and you struggle with that. And that's fine. When you can, you'll move toward a place where you'll be able to admit the truth about the circumstances of their death without embarrassment. It happened; it was real. You only harm yourself by covering up the truth.

You may also be thinking about suicide – the taking of our own life – a topic many people do not like to discuss. But the truth is many of us who have experienced the death of a loved one do think about suicide when the pain seems to get too great. You are not alone. Almost all of us have, at some time during the grieving process, wondered whether it would be better just to cut the journey short and end it all. Well, my friend, remember, there is a big difference between *thinking it* and *doing it*.

We all go through such great sadness. When the pain gets so intense, it is natural to search for ways to alleviate the pain. We all do this. Don't be embarrassed for having such thoughts. Just remember; you know nothing would be solved from acting upon it. You would only hurt those around you more than they already hurt now. You need to know you will definitely get through this painful episode, this confusion. You will wake tomorrow morning and you will move forward. You may not think so right now, but you will.

If you find yourself in need of a confidential friend to talk to when you feel this way, please call the Suicide Prevention Crisis Hotline in your community. Call local information at 555-1212 and ask for their telephone number. Write it on the inside front cover of this book, along with other important numbers of family and friends who have supported you through this time. If you feel blue or can't seem to shake these thoughts, please call those hotline numbers. Most are available 24 hours a day and have trained counselors to speak with you about your grief. And you don't ever need to give your name.

So right now, pick up the phone and call information for the Suicide Prevention Crisis Hotline in your community. When you have obtained that number, write it down in big numbers on the inside front cover of this book. (Yes, do it right now!) You will then have it handy if you feel blue, or worse.

Two other excellent confidential hotlines are:

- The 700 Club (800) 759-0700 - a Christian 24-hour hotline where you will find folks willing to listen, counsel and pray with you about anything.
- Girls and Boys Town National Hotline (800) 448-3000 - a 24-hour hotline for you and especially for the young people in your life who are struggling with grief and feelings of despair about any issue.

Remember; don't just call when you feel totally out of control. Use these hotlines when you are having a difficult time coping and just need someone to talk to. There will be times when you feel like you've burdened your family and friends enough. Perhaps you've gotten the subtle signs that you should be over this by now. Don't get angry; get help. Reach out to others in the community who are always willing to listen to your pain.

In the back of this book are the listings of the national offices of organizations for many different types of grief. They will be happy to mail you materials about their support groups and the location of the one closest to you. When you call the crisis line, ask them to supply you with local bereavement support group information. Write these numbers in the cover also.

You may also want to put these telephone numbers on your bedroom mirror, on your refrigerator, or in your wallet. That way, when you are having a tough time, they are right there for you. You may find yourself doing a great deal of your griefwork when everyone has gone home and you are pacing the floor at 2:00 a.m. A knot in your stomach, your family is sleeping and your support system is not there for you right now. This is the perfect time to call the Hotline.

It is essential that you talk to people. You must develop a social network of individuals and counselors who, if necessary, will listen to you tell your story again and again because it's so important that you get out your anger, your frustration and your anxiety. You want someone to talk to about very personal, intimate information and this may not be something you want to share with family members. You want to discuss concerns that are not appropriate for family members. You may be too embarrassed to bring up issues for fear they will think you are stupid or ignorant. With anonymous hotlines, now you have that safe outlet.

## ***Spiritual Challenges***

Ever notice how we cry out for help in crisis, but rarely give God time when all is well? The first thing we do is shout, "Oh, my God" or start to pray. We cry out to Him because we inherently know where to find comfort.

When someone we love dies or is killed, we usually either turn toward God for comfort and peace or turn away in anger for what we expected Him to do or not do.

Below are some of the conflicts you may encounter:

— You go into a bargaining mode with God in an attempt to somehow prevent the loss. "I'll go to Sunday services for the rest of my life if only you'll bring Mom back to me, even for just one minute."

— Everything you believed before their death, you now question. Your belief system is totally shaken. You've had these grounded beliefs but start to wonder what life is all about. You ask many "why" questions.

— You wonder whether your loved one's death or its timing is punishment for their or your past transgressions.



— Sometimes you have dreams of your loved one and you are not clear what they may mean.

— You question whether your loved one's soul is in the right place. Are they in heaven?

— You simply ask, “WHY?” “Why her?” “Why now?” “Why this way?” Your head spins and you never receive an answer, all the while torturing yourself as a sort of penance for what you did or didn't do for your loved one.

I wish I could give you an answer to all your “whys.” I can only tell you that most of us go through a period of “whys” and there is little to be done about it. It's just part of our questioning nature. Some people will religiously try to dissuade you from speaking like this but, whether you say these words out loud or in your soul, you are saying and thinking them.

Understand that this is normal and you shouldn't beat yourself up because you are feeling these feelings and questioning God. Remember, God is almighty and if He can take millions of people all around this world, both loving and hating Him simultaneously each day, He can handle your “why” questions. He still loves you anyway.

What you need to do, though, is understand you may never get an answer. A favorite woman minister enlightened me about this. “If we could answer all the ‘why’ questions,” she said, “*we'd* be God.” Just think about that. If we knew the answers to all things, *we'd* be God. And if He gave us this ability, we wouldn't need Him any longer, would we?

So you see, we have a choice. We can either wallow in asking questions we will probably never know the answers to until we ourselves die, or we can create a more livable existence for ourselves for the remainder of our days. We have this power.

And the miraculous thing about God is that He loves us whether we love Him or hate Him. But He's a gentleman and won't intrude where He's not wanted. He's always just a moment away and waits for us to ask for His help. He wants to comfort us in our grief. All we need do is say, “Lord, I need you. Please help me.” That's it.

Lastly, for those skeptics who need proof - just ask for it. Ask Him to show you a sign. Just say, “God, I want to believe. Please make something

happen in such a way that I will absolutely, positively know only You could have brought it to pass.”

I'll be waiting for your letter.

## ***Financial Challenges***

Under normal circumstances, our financial health can be challenging but, for some families after a loved one's death, a decrease in income can cause an added burden to the grieving process.

When a child dies, both parents may miss extended periods of time at work and, if no benefits exist, savings may dwindle, credit cards may be used to survive, and the family's debt might steadily grow.

After the death of a spouse, the financial picture in a household changes. If you and your spouse were both receiving social security, your benefits may be considerably reduced. Maybe there were two incomes. Pensions may now cease. Consequently, you, as the surviving spouse, find yourself in a difficult position. You may feel it wise to sell the house, downsize to a different location, or perhaps move in with children. If you move, you may feel burdened by adjusting to the loss of your loved one's presence in a strange place.

When a young parent dies, the surviving parent may now be the sole caretaker of many children. The income of the surviving parent is not enough to meet the expenses. Now the option becomes whether to sell the house and move to an apartment. Uprooting children at a very vulnerable time in their life only compounds their grief, as they may additionally have to deal with the loss of their friends, teachers and classmates.

If you are not financially savvy, this is the time to learn how to handle finances to your benefit. A short-term financial education now is one of the most important investments you can make. I know too many people who have endured great financial hardship, in addition to the death of their loved one, because they were so overwrought with grief that bills were left unpaid and their credit history was ruined. Some eventually visited the bankruptcy court. Don't let this happen to you. Do whatever is necessary to reduce debt to free you up from unnecessary burdens. Therefore, if you need to take extended time away from work, you will have the ability to do so. It is when you feel that you cannot that additional

pressure can build. Develop a plan that will give you as many financial options as possible.

Below are a number of excellent agencies that can help you better understand your financial options after a loved one's death:

— Social Security Administration. This federal agency will answer questions about you and your spouse's benefits and if you are eligible for monies. Widows and widowers over the age of 62 can collect social security benefits and, even after one spouse has died, benefits, although decreased, are still paid to the surviving spouse. Additionally, spouses younger than 62 with surviving children and spouses who are disabled become eligible for assistance. Contact them at (800) 772-1213 or at their website, [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov), to locate the office closest to you.

— For those who have experienced the murder of a loved one, each state offers a program known as a Crime Victim's Board. These state agencies help provide funding to serve the needs of the surviving family members, offering them mental health counseling, funeral expenses and other covered expenses. You can learn whether you are eligible to receive benefits by contacting your district attorney or police department where the crime was committed. A Crime Victim/Witness Advocate will help you complete the necessary paperwork.

— Consumer Credit Counseling Service. With offices located throughout the United States, including services to our military personnel, trained credit counselors will help reduce your debt to manageable amounts. Contact the National Foundation for Credit Counseling at (800) 388-2227 or through their extensive and informative website, [www.nfcc.org](http://www.nfcc.org), to find the center nearest you.

As soon as possible after the funeral, have your financial situation reviewed by a trusted certified financial planner or credit counseling professional. Reduce all debt by as much as you can. Credit counseling people can help you reduce your credit card interest significantly, thus allowing you fewer bills and less pressure. You are dealing with enough pressure now. Eliminating the financial pressure will help you recover with fewer burdens. In addition to reducing credit card payments, the credit counselors will help you restructure your budget with the goal of having fewer bills.

If you need a loan to consolidate your bills, do not take a home equity or second mortgage on your home. You do not know how long you may be out of work, or whether you will be able to continue in that particular job as you work

through the grieving process. You would never want your home in jeopardy simply because you need to pay off a few credit cards. The Credit Counseling Bureau will work out a plan with your creditors to reduce your debt. The whole idea here is to reduce the pressure you feel financially so you can work on your emotional needs.

If you are in a dire situation, perhaps your husband has died and you are the sole breadwinner for three children, it may be wise to consider one personal loan to pay off everything, thus having one manageable bill each month. An effective strategy is to apply for the loan while you are still earning your current income. Don't wait until months down the road when you are well into your grieving and may not have the stamina to investigate your options. At that point, you may have had to take a lesser job, with a lower income, because you couldn't handle the pressure. Getting the loan at this point may be more difficult than had you applied immediately after the death. And, if you have this extra money, you will open up your options. You will have the ability to take a different job by choice instead of necessity, to be around the children more, or to pay for the babysitter from 3:00-6:00 when they arrive home from school and you are still working.

Now you may ask, "How will I possibly have the energy to explore loans immediately following my spouse's, parent's or child's death?" Remember that bubble we spoke about earlier. That's the protective barrier that gives us the incredible strength to plan the funeral, handle all the details and make sure everyone else is okay. Well, use that protection to keep your focus on your money and to learn exactly where you stand. You cannot make wise decisions when you don't have the true picture. Use this opportunity to educate yourself and take charge now, even if you need a financially savvy friend or relative for a second opinion.

— If you have substantial funds and little knowledge about how to handle them, or if your spouse's or parent's Last Will and Testament provided you with a large insurance policy or estate, it's time to speak with an experienced professional. You need detailed advice on where to invest such monies and the tax ramifications of your decisions. The National Association of Personal Financial Advisors is an organization which recommends "fee only" Certified Financial Planners (CFAs) who work for you.

Some CFAs don't charge a fee, but you indirectly pay for their advice when you invest in the stocks, bonds and mutual funds of the companies they endorse, who in turn pay them a hefty commission. Trouble is, those funds may

not be doing as well as others and, because the CFA doesn't receive any commission from the other, more favorable funds, they will instead sway you to their own funds. Consequently, a "fee only" CFA is where you want to go. Contact them at (800) 366-2732 or visit their website, [www.napfa.org](http://www.napfa.org), to find a "fee only" professional who can attend your financial needs.

— He is known as the "Consumer Warrior" and his nationally syndicated radio show gives outstanding advice on all financial matters. Clark Howard is heard each weekday and is a wealth of knowledge who will help educate you on basic investing and money management. His books include *Consumer Survival Kit III* and, his most recent, *Get Clark Smart*. Visit his website, [www.clarkhoward.com](http://www.clarkhoward.com), to locate your local radio station and to give you the most comprehensive look at finance in a down-to-earth manner you will understand.

Whatever financial decisions you make, always build into each as much flexibility as possible. Getting rid of as much debt as possible will decrease your financial burden and free you from feeling trapped while trying to grieve at the same time.

## *Chapter IV*

### *Effects of Grief on Marriage*

During the best of times, marriage can be strained. But during hard times, when either one or both partners is grieving, it can be even more difficult to communicate and understand what your mate truly needs from you.

There will be times when only one person will be going through the grieving process. Other times, both partners will be mourning the death of someone close. Either way, your reactions can be so critically different. This would be a perfect opportunity to draw together, become closer, share your most intimate sorrows, your pain, your fear, and support each other throughout one of life's most difficult experiences. But often that is not what occurs.

You believe, in some mysterious way, that your spouse understands exactly what you feel. But you are unwilling or unable to give your spouse the information they need to understand those feelings. Although you may not be interested in expressing it right now, they should instead somehow develop the ability to read your mind. You want them to know exactly what you are going through and how you feel, and you want them to make you feel better all at the same time, which is, of course, impossible.

There are times when you feel that your pain is so unbearable that you might just lose control if you risk talking about it. Men, especially, feel this way. If they do open up, they're afraid of what might happen. It is just too mentally overwhelming and leaves them vulnerable.

They still deal with the "big boys don't cry" attitude. And there are many men who measure their strength by being independent, in control. When they see women in such pain, they feel inadequate and tend to want to "fix" the pain. Problem is, grief is not instantly fixable. It is a journey.

Each of us feels inadequate to solve the hurts of the other. And couples deal with those hurts in very different ways. Both partners may feel out of control. Some men deal with this by overcompensating, by working long hours at the office. At least at the office, they think, "I am in control of my work environment."

Some women, to feel more in control of their environment, competently take charge of the grief of everyone else in the household and decide it's their job to "make it okay" for everyone else while sidestepping their own emotional well-being. If she concentrates on others, she will not have to examine and handle her own pain. Both are forms of denying pain and putting it on the shelf for another day. Partners will heal more completely when they are willing to see what they are doing and work through the pain instead of going around it.

Partners also experience what I call the "eggshell" game: tip-toeing around one another because one spouse may be having a good day while the other is in deep sorrow. The spouse who is doing better today is uncertain whether they should be happy to bring their sorrowful partner up, or reduce their own mood to their partner's low level. It is a no-win situation and most couples experience this at some point in their grieving process.

You must discuss it openly and let each other know it is coming up for you. Chances are, each of you will have had the experience and neither could find a good solution. Do I act happy or sad for my partner's benefit today? When you continually alter your mood to meet the mood of your partner, you will eventually feel out of control, even more so than you do now. And if it persists, resentment can build.

After discussing this with your spouse, be compassionate and loving. You might be having a strong period now and feel overburdened by their depressed state but just remember, that could be you in a few weeks. You don't know how you might react later in your grieving process - so be kind and understand the intensity of their pain right now. Love them. Hug and hold them often. Bring them small gifts to say you understand.

If you find yourself on an upswing, discuss it with your partner, then consider spending a little more time with other grieving folks who are also at your "up-mood" level. You will find soulful friends like this at your bereavement group. They will listen without judgment and they will support and allow any unexpected emotions which may surface because they've been there. Remember,

partners cannot always be everything to their spouses at all times, not even when we are not grieving. Everyone needs outlets, which our spouse may not be able to provide.

If you love golfing and your wife does not, an afternoon with the guys to just clear your mind of some of your pain might be just what you need. If your wife is feeling a bit better and you need to stay under the covers this Saturday to do your grieving because you had to be "on" all week at work, then it would be healthy for you to have your "alone time" while she visits with friends who understand her pain and want to provide something fun to lift her mood.

Another way to help open the lines of communication is through keeping a journal. While we mentioned it earlier as a way to release tension and frustration each day through the magic of the pen, it can also be extremely helpful in connecting more with your partner.

After writing in your journal, you may wish to share a part of your concerns with your spouse. The wonderful way to do this is perhaps to take a day trip - go to a park, or to a lake, somewhere quiet and secluded where you can talk and not be disturbed. Enjoy the mountain, beach, arboretum or other special place in nature. Feel the wind at your face. Watch the beauty all around you. Notice the smallest bird hop along the sandy beach.

Use this opportunity to share your concerns. If you find it too difficult to express yourself out loud, then purchase a journal and write letters to each other. You will be amazed how effective a letter can be because it doesn't allow anyone to interrupt your thoughts. In a loving way, explain what's going on for you. And then, consider how your spouse can help you, but be specific.

"I'm feeling very fatigued. I would like to rely on you to do the laundry with me each Saturday," or "I need more time alone. Can I count on you to take the kids out for dinner one time each week?" Then talk about it or, if it's too painful, write your response back in a letter of your own. Hold each other - sometimes that's all we need when we are in such emotional pain.

Keep that journal in your bedroom and use it to communicate back and forth. After you've written your letter about what is going on for you, put the journal in his night table drawer. When he's responded, he'll then put the journal in your night table drawer. Unlike when we speak with each other, journaling gives us the ability to share feelings without judgment. Happy communicating.



## *Chapter V*

### *Effects of Grief on Children*

It wasn't long ago that children were sheltered from the reality of death. Most families would keep secrets from children by telling them that "Grandma went on vacation" or that "Grandpa went to live with Aunt Jane." Many were not taken to funeral homes to say their last goodbyes because it was believed it would scare and scar them for life.

But over time, we learned that we did more harm than good in sheltering them from the pain. Although they were little, they were not stupid. They knew something very wrong had happened but were too immature to thoroughly express their pain with words. This did not make what they were feeling any less real.

If, at an early age, you lived through the death of a significant person in your life, you know exactly what I'm describing. The hushed voices so you wouldn't hear. The wondering how Grandma would feel when she returned from that vacation to find Mother had given all her clothes away.

And when we became older, we either figured it out for ourselves or someone finally told us that Grandma had died all that time ago. We then felt betrayed that we weren't told the whole truth and sad that we never had a chance to say goodbye.

Grown adults whose parent died at a young age still tell me stories of how, for years, they never truly knew how their mother or father died because their surviving parent and aunts and uncles thought it best not to mention their name. That somehow 'out of sight, out of mind' would make it all better. And they still carry the emotional scars.

The fact is that children grieve the same way we do. They feel real pain and have real needs, just as we do. Even infants sense when there is an upset in the family. So it is imperative that children be permitted to grieve. And because of their tender age, more time and consideration to their needs is also imperative.

Here are some issues children deal with after a loved one's death:

— It was once thought that children shouldn't attend a funeral or wake because it would be detrimental to their mental health if they saw a person in a casket. Because of this philosophy, many children didn't get an opportunity to see their loved ones or say goodbye in a manner which would have helped them along their grieving process and have unanswered questions resolved.

Today, many funeral directors employ bereavement coordinators. One of their responsibilities is to be with the children, explaining what is going on, encouraging their expression through art and letters, and providing a safe place for them to sit, sometimes with other young relatives, within the funeral home during the services. Wise parents will ask to speak with this individual when making plans in order to gain better insight as to how to handle various situations. Questions might be: Should the children attend only the afternoon services or should they be with us at evening services as well? Can I arrive earlier each day to give them more private time with their loved one? What type of items should I encourage my child to place in the casket? What are some of the questions she might ask and how do I answer her?

— Children's emotional responses are much like our own.

- They feel the same shock, disbelief and confusion.
- There is a greater sense of vulnerability because of their ages and they depend on us even more than before.
- They also go through depression and withdrawal, just like us.
- They cry, have fits of anger and rage, become rebellious and act out, especially when their grief is not addressed. This is very important because we spend so much time doing our own grieving that our children are often left to do their griefwork alone. I strongly encourage you to find family and friends, who will shepherd or watch over your youngsters and help them go through the grieving process, if you are so completely overwhelmed that you have no energy left for them.

— They may regress physically, as well as emotionally. Young children may now wet the bed where they didn't before the funeral and cling to you, not

wanting you to be physically out of their sight. Some cannot sleep unless they are in your bed.

— When a parent loses a child, the surviving siblings go through traumatic times. They desperately need the love and support of their parents, but Mom and Dad are so depressed they can barely communicate. The entire family is turned upside down and often the older surviving sibling takes on the role of parent while the parent becomes the child. This role reversal allows the household to function in its own dysfunctional way.

I've spoken with many children who have told me that they've done the household shopping, the laundry, learned how to cook dinner, even to the point where they've written the checks for the bills. They've taken over where their parents had to leave off. And one of the most difficult things for these children is that after they have seen their parents move to a stability point where the parents are now holding down a job again - cooking dinner again, handling the chores around the house - it is then that the children start to rebel and/or do their griefwork.

When they took over the household duties and became surrogate parents for the younger siblings, they delayed their grieving process until they knew their parents were functioning and stable. In addition to their own grief, they had this added burden, which denied them their childhood years - years they can never recover.

So now we have a situation where it may be two or three years down the road and everyone is wondering why Johnny isn't over this by now. He was doing so well. What happened all of a sudden? These older siblings, at that point, have no support from friends or teachers who thought they were "over it by now." And even their parents are wondering why they are acting out all of a sudden.

These courageous and selfless children became adults by necessity yet didn't get the support they needed when they needed it. So two years or more down the road, their parents, teachers, principal don't expect them to need help now. "They didn't need it in the beginning - why now?" they ask. But the fact is that when school counseling was immediately available two days after the death, the student, like you, was still in shock. Nothing had sunk in yet. The real counseling is needed now - when the student is ready - not when the counselor or principal believes the student should be ready.

Additionally, there is a very real possibility that the student won't want to open up to the school guidance counselor. They may be concerned that their feelings won't be kept confidential. In this case, turn toward resources in your community such as a bereavement support group especially designed for school-aged youth.

— Unresolved grief is a major cause of rebelliousness and acting out. And if left unchecked, it could lead to drug abuse, alcoholism, self-mutilation and arrests by law enforcement for petty or serious crimes. Kids use these methods to numb the pain and unleash their rage. They are screaming inside and feel they have been left out of the grieving process. They need love and concern now and ask themselves, "Where is help for me?"

They are begging for someone who will guide them and it is our job, as adults, to find a group or other person, who has had similar experiences, with whom they can relate. That may be a friend, another relative, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins. But it is imperative that we get children the appropriate support system, just like you sought out for yourself.

— Children, like us, struggle with concentration. They have trouble in school because their minds wander, just like adults do. They tend toward extremes: overeating vs. no appetite, no interest in classwork vs. an overly devoted student, the inability to sleep vs. long bouts under the covers.

— Especially if one parent has died, there is a deep fear that their surviving parent or caregiver will abandon them or die as well. Not only do they deal with the fear of losing their parent physically, but they also fear losing them emotionally. The parent is no longer there to listen to them or comfort them. It is important that you simply "be" with them, spend time with them. They feel isolated, neglected, unloved, lonely, unprotected and unsafe.

— They fear changes in the routine of the household. They see changes in their bodies, their environment and their routine, which they are not accustomed to. They fear new things or unwelcome adults. Sometimes, in the case of homicide, they are dealing with visits from district attorneys and detectives coming in and out of the house. The media might be camped outside their doorstep.

— They fear a new identity or new role in the family's structure. If a sibling has died, the surviving sibling, who was once the youngest, may now be

the only child. Or they may have been the second child and are now the eldest. So when their place in the family has changed, a new role is unfairly bestowed upon them and they are trying to find their way in this new role.

Many times surviving siblings believe it is their duty to take over the role of the sibling who died. This is very difficult because how do you take over for a person who has died? There is no way you can. There is no way you can live up to those expectations and it becomes a futile battle for them.

They may take on their mannerisms, or begin playing sports their deceased brother loved but which they despise - all in the name of love for him and their parents. Now children do gain comfort from wearing their brother's baseball glove or styling their hair in the same way he did, or listening to his music. If it's behavior which draws them closer to their brother's memory, that's effective in dealing with their grief. But when they are trying to be someone they are not for the benefit of others, that is harmful to the surviving child.

— Children, like us, experience guilt. When their sibling or parent was alive, they may have said or done mean things to them, had arguments or disagreed with them. They may have said things like, "Oh, I wish you were dead." And now that the sibling or parent has died, they feel a deep sense of regret thinking they somehow caused that person's death with their words or actions. Young ones are especially sensitive to this because they don't understand that words themselves cannot kill. You need to discuss this and reassure them that this is not the case.

— Young people deal with the shame involved in certain types of deaths, just as adults do. Perhaps your loved one died of suicide or even homicide, a stigma that still can exist. Their peers can be so cruel and carry on in front of their friends at school, leaving them to feel worse. Tell them the truth about how their loved one died. There is nothing worse than finding out on the baseball field.

— Some children feel guilty that they are alive and their sibling is dead. They normally say to me, "My parents ignore me because they're going through their own pain and I just want to scream out, 'look at me, I am still alive.' Don't you notice me, don't you know I'm still here? I didn't die, too."

— Oftentimes children are uncertain how to act around adults, because they see adults happy one minute, sad the next and depressed the next. That inconsistent pattern of emotion confuses children.

— They have similar physical symptoms to us: cramps, nausea, vomiting, headaches, dizziness and children have many nightmares and daydreams about what could have been or what might happen in the future.

— They are afraid of many things:

- that they will die too.
- that their parents will die.
- that they will be abandoned.
- that it was their fault.
- that they said something that caused this death to happen.
- that they did something that caused this death to happen.

— Children take many things literally:

- don't say the person is sleeping.
- don't say they are away on vacation.
- don't say, as in the movie, *Corinna, Corinna*, that the mother is in the bathtub.

— Children look for ways to comfort themselves. They will wear the clothing of their deceased sibling or parent. They may play the music they loved. Shop at the stores they loved. Visit the malls they frequented. And adults do the same. (I still wear my grandmother's warm-up suits around the house. And for over a year after her death, I wore her engagement ring.)

One of the most important recommendations I can give is to search for and enroll your child or children in a bereavement support group early in their grieving process. Many times, a children's group will run simultaneously, yet separately, from a parent's group. Sometimes your community is blessed to have a special house dedicated to the needs of grieving children and families - a Grieving Children's Center. Other times, the bereavement coordinator at a local organization will hold bereavement groups for children right at their schools.

I strongly encourage you to enroll your children in a support group specifically designed for children who have experienced the death of a loved one. In some communities, bereaved children are grouped with children of divorce, separation or those dealing with other transitions, like moving into a new home. Placing children in a group with children of divorce will not be nearly as effective as a group for children who have experienced a death. It only causes additional harm for your child to see another child walk home with their father, when your child has already buried his.

Children's bereavement groups provide young people with an outlet to express their grief. Counselors and trained volunteers are skilled in helping children release their anger. They do it with drawings, punching bags and puppets, acting out emotional scenes. That is how children express themselves, because unlike us, they do not yet have the language skills, vocabulary and maturity to communicate their pain. So instead, they draw, color or play with puppets to act out their pain. In the process, they are taught that what they are going through is perfectly normal, which is so important for them. They meet other children their age who have experienced similar tragedies and they realize they are not alone. There are others like themselves who are hurting too, and it's okay to be sad.

## ***Chapter VI***

### ***Relationships with Family, Friends and Business Colleagues***

Most family, friends and business colleagues who truly care about you will be present at the time of the funeral and beyond. But there will usually come a time when most, but not necessarily all, of them will grow weary of what they consider to be your “prolonged” reaction to the death of your loved one.

Those closest to you who have experienced a loved one's death will most likely be there to comfort you in the late night hours when you need someone to talk to and can't sleep. But know these friends are few and far between. The reality is, even friends who have experienced a deathloss may choose not to be around you because, as we said earlier, it simply brings up too many painful memories of their own grief journey and they choose not to relive it through your experience. They may not be able to express that to you, but just know that this may be the very thing which answers the questions of why “they,” of all people who know what you are going through, haven't come over, or called, or sent a note, or been there for you as you thought they would. Don't be upset; just realize for them, right now, it may be too soon to relive that pain.

True friends and family are the ones who stick by you through “thick and thin.” And this is the “thin” time. But you must take responsibility and express to them, to the best of your ability, where you need their help and where you don't. It's just as important to express what you don't want as what you do.



So here are some suggestions:

— “Just be with me. Be in the house. Stay over a few nights each week so it's not so lonely.” After my grandfather's death, I temporarily relocated to my grandparent's house, commuting to and from work. For my grandmother, this month-long sleepover was a source of great comfort, as she hadn't lived alone in over 50 years.

— “Do chores for me. Do the running - drycleaners, supermarket, pharmacy, etc.” You may not have the patience now for long lines and traffic jams. But soon you will take charge again.

— “I need to spend more time with the grandkids. Can I have them twice each month on a Sunday afternoon?” This is your lonely time. You can fill up Monday through Friday with work, find something to do on Saturday, but when Sunday comes the house may feel much too empty.

— “I need your support at the trial. Can you get any flexible time off in mid-March?” Homicide and Vehicular Homicide trials are confusing and overwhelming. Your loved one's character is on trial and hearing painful, untrue accusations by defense attorneys can be very unsettling.

— “I just can't dismantle the nursery alone. I'd prefer to leave it up forever, especially since we're not ready for another child yet. But I need your strength to make decisions on what to keep and what to give away.” One of the most difficult decisions you will make is what to do with your loved one's belongings and room. You will draw comfort from smelling their scent on their clothing, from holding their possessions, looking at their awards and pictures. Nothing will make this process any less painful, but at some point you will know in your soul it is time. That doesn't mean to rid yourself of everything. Perhaps storage in secure boxes in the attic is the answer so every so often, when it's their birthday or a special occasion is near, you get to revisit their favorites. You needn't destroy the memories; just neatly make a safe place for them.

— “Will you please ask me to dinner a few times a month?” If work is the only social experience you have, you may ask family and friends to provide other times for necessary interaction. This will help decrease chances for depression and too much time to think about your pain.

— “Will you occasionally take my children to your home so Joe and I can mourn the baby's death alone?” Couples who have experienced a loved one's

death need quality time for themselves when they are grieving one of their children.

Business colleagues can also surprise you. Some will show great compassion by taking up a collection to help with your expenses, attending the funeral and working overtime for you while you are away for a week or two. Others will not even mention your loss and act as though nothing has happened.

The interesting thing is that there is no rhyme or reason to an individual's reaction and compassion toward you. That colleague who was so helpful in the beginning of your grief, it may turn out, did the honorable thing to make himself look good, but he may be the one who wonders when you will be pulling your weight again. And the quiet one, who didn't know how to express his sympathy when you experienced your loss, may be just the one who is willing to come in on Saturday to help support you in that major project, when he knows you are not up to it emotionally just yet. People will surprise you in both good and bad ways.

The key to having your needs met is to communicate as much as you can. Remember, as with your spouse, your business colleagues, family and friends cannot read your mind. Take some time to explore exactly what you want from them and then tell them. Sometimes the most difficult thing to do is to find out what will really help you.

This is especially important when communicating with your boss. Remember, his main function is to get the work out in a timely and profitable manner. So try to think like he does.

How can you help him reach his goals, while helping you get what you need to grieve effectively? Ask yourself a better question: "How can we both get what we want? How can I develop a plan which will be a win-win situation for both of us?"

— If you are having trouble being around people, perhaps the solution is coming in at five or six in the morning and working till noon. This would reduce the stress of rush-hour traffic and, for a few hours, you would have a quiet office in which to work.

— Perhaps you need more time with your family right now. Offer to take work home or telecommute until things become more stable at home.

— If you need to attend to the affairs of a parent who has died, maybe a short leave of absence is in order. Check with your human resources director to see how much time off would be feasible without jeopardizing your position.

— For those who have had a severe deathloss, i.e. suicide, murder or other sudden death, you may find it necessary to ask for a less stressful position until you have healed more fully. That may mean a different job function, part-time work, or shared work with another employee. Only you can examine and determine your needs and the needs of your family at such a difficult time. Reorganizing your finances with a financial counselor may be just the thing to alleviate some of the stress, allowing you to work a less demanding job just now.

— Maybe all you need is the flexibility to take a few hours a day off for a few months - working six or seven hour days instead of eight or ten. Perhaps it means taking Fridays off for three months, shortening the week and giving you more concentrated time to be with your family. This may be much more effective than taking a two-week vacation this year.

However you use your options, the key to having an expanded support system outside of your immediate family is to communicate your needs as clearly as possible. And most people in business are more than willing to accommodate your needs when they learn you have structured your proposals with their needs in mind.

And lastly, a most intriguing thing happens when we grieve. The people we thought would be there to help up through our most difficult moments may not be the ones who come through. Somehow other people, who we would never have thought were capable of such compassion, or others we had never met before our loss, wind up being the most friendly, the most compassionate ones who act like family for us now. There is nothing wrong with that. I believe God places people in our path just when we need them. So be grateful for these new faces and don't focus on what you aren't getting or what you expected to get from your family and friends. Focus on the good fortune of having a whole new network of caring people around you at this difficult time.

## *Chapter VII*

### *Holidays, Anniversaries and Special Occasions*

Every one of us will encounter the empty and anxious feeling when we realize a certain special day is approaching. That day might be our loved one's first birthday after their death, the first anniversary of their death, or a special occasion whereby most of our family will gather, such as the birth of a baby, a wedding, a graduation or a wedding anniversary.

Most bereaved persons will tell you the anticipation of your feelings on that day far exceed your actual emotions. You're so anxious and so tense and so afraid of what that day will bring that when that day does arrive, to a certain degree, it's almost a letdown. You think to yourself, "I actually survived today. The day went fairly well. It wasn't as bad as I thought. Yes, it was traumatizing but it wasn't all that I built it up to be in my head."

Here are a few suggestions:

— I do encourage you to plan ahead for such events, even if the specific plans you make do not materialize. At least you start with a plan and go with the flow. This way you won't be caught off guard, sitting at home with nothing to do and with no compassionate friends to surround you.

— When invitations come, build into each one the ability to change your mind. Yes - change your mind. It's okay to change your mind. With each RSVP, you might say, "I really want to join you, but I'm afraid I'll wake up that day and not feel like being around a lot of people. So I'm accepting on the

condition that I can cancel at the last minute or, if I do attend and it gets too much for me, you won't be offended if I leave early." Now you've set the stage to be comfortable either way. Use this technique especially for Christmas plans.

— Be selective with invitations. Don't accept invitations simply because of obligation, past attendance, or guilt. There are no "shoulds" anymore. Do what makes you feel comfortable, surrounded by caring, compassionate people who understand your grief and are willing to support whatever emotions may come up for you.

— On special days, and especially at Christmas and other year-end holidays, try to surround yourself with those who will not dismiss or minimize your pain. Nothing is more difficult than suppressing your needs, especially now, to make others feel more comfortable. Communicate with family and friends - they cannot automatically know what you need. If you want others to speak openly about your loved one - using their name out loud - you must express your wishes to them. Remember, you will always encounter those who still believe "out of sight, out of mind." Who are they kidding? You need to set them straight by telling them it will make you feel better, not worse, to speak of your loved one, even if your tears flow. Often those closest to us are uncertain whether mentioning your loved one by name will bring you joy or pain. They need *for you* to give them permission.

— Spread the joy around. If you've had an opportunity to sort through your loved one's belongings, that special occasion may be the perfect time to present a special memento to your family member. But use discretion. Giving the bride a personal piece of jewelry which was her mother's should be done weeks prior to the ceremony so she can handle the emotions she may feel in private, rather than on her wedding day where she may be caught off-guard and ruin an otherwise beautiful time.

— Don't expect perfection either in what you plan, the gifts you buy for others, or the activities you attend. Shop for gifts via store and mail order catalogs and the internet. Many merchants will wrap, include a gift card and ship directly to your loved one. This takes the pain out of going to the store and seeing all the young girls' clothing and dolls you will not be buying for your daughter.

Christmas and other year-end holidays are a time of reunion, festive meals and gift giving. But for those grieving the death of a loved one, this time of year can bring anxiety, mixed emotions and heartache. Consider these things you can do to reduce the stress and alleviate unnecessary pain:

— Understand that you are working at limited capacity and have less physical and mental energy. You may have trouble focusing and concentrating. You may need more rest. Don't beat yourself up about this. There is no magical way to cope with your pain during the holiday season. Be gentle and patient with yourself. The holidays will definitely feel different this year and perhaps for a number of years to come.

— Keep planning simple. The more complex, the more energy you need. Make a list of all your traditional activities. Next to each event write down your thoughts and feelings: *This year I don't have the motivation to cook dinner for twenty guests.* In a third column entitled "How could we do this differently?" write alternative ideas to that tradition: *Ask my sister to prepare dinner this year or would Christmas brunch be easier.* Discuss these new possibilities with family members. Let the list sit for a day or two then go back and make some decisions.

— After you've made these decisions, don't second-guess yourself. And don't feel guilty. You are doing what you need to do to cope with this intense holiday and all the emotion it brings.

— Limit the activities you do choose. If you decide to bake your famous cookies, make three dozen instead of the usual six. Recruit a family member or friend to shop for the ingredients, decorate the delicacies and help clean up.

— Break down your chosen activities into small segments. Don't try to do everything all at once. There is no hidden law that says you must decorate the Christmas tree and the entire house the same day.

— Try to add one new tradition in memory of your loved one. Meet at the cemetery as a family to decorate a small Christmas tree. Visit the lake, beach, park or mountains to release colorful helium balloons with private messages attached to each ribbon.

— Find a supportive friend who will stay close to you during those difficult times throughout the holidays. Depression can easily set in along with the desire to hide under the covers. Don't let this happen to you. If you are feeling blue, call that friend and talk it out. Play soothing music in your home and pull back the curtains to welcome in the sunshine. Call your local 24-hour crisis center or perhaps your favorite ministry's prayer line. These folks are trained to listen and help you. Don't shut yourself out from the rest of the world, no matter how tempting.

— Spend the holidays with someone. Try not to be alone. Consider when the loneliest times are for you and make arrangements to visit with others, have them visit with you, or plan an activity out.

— Include the children. Remember, children grieve at holiday time too. Encourage them to draw pictures and decorate cards to hang on the tree or display on the fireplace mantel.

— Spend more time with teenagers and young adults - this may be their first death experience. New emotions associated with the grieving process can be scary. If you are having difficulty connecting with your child, ask a trusted relative to “shepherd,” or watch over them. Don't be offended if they find comfort sharing their fears with an adult other than you. Your pride is less important than finding your child a safe haven to express himself.

— Limit your use of drugs and alcohol. Masking the pain doesn't make it go away - it only postpones the grieving process. You don't want to compound one painful situation with a long-term addiction.

— Do for others. By volunteering to help your community's less fortunate, you take the focus off yourself and your pain. Is there a local nursing or retirement home that would appreciate your family's time?

— If you find yourself happy, smiling or laughing, don't feel guilty about it. You are entitled to the release laughter brings.

— Whatever occasion is before you, if it becomes a very difficult day, remember the Crisis Line. That's what they do - they are there for you when you need to talk to someone. And don't think you can only use them in absolute desperate times or at 2:00 a.m. Use those numbers and don't ever be embarrassed. They know bereaved folks are more susceptible to the blues at this time of year.

For other special occasions, there are many ways to include your loved one's memory in the festivities:

— Learning to make the piñata for the children the same way your grandfather did for you.

— Having folks over on the anniversary of their death, on the condition that they arrive with the funniest story each shared with your loved one.

— Having a picnic at the cemetery.

— Letting white balloons go after the wedding ceremony with flowers from your bouquet attached to the bunch.

— Purchasing the toys you would have given to your child on his or her birthday and donating them to an orphanage.

— Pulling out all the old pictures and designing a new picture album of treasured memories.

While special days are never easy because we so wish they could be with us, taking time to think through a good plan and creating memorable time with family and friends can make it that much more bearable.



## *Chapter VIII*

### *Honoring Your Loved One*

As you begin to heal, you will look for ways to honor your loved one's memory. They may be small or very significant ways, but the point is to choose events and contributions that will make a difference in others' lives.

Here are just some of the ways other bereaved individuals have honored their loved ones:

— Planting a special type of tree or plant, which brought them great joy, in a public place for all to see. Check with your local mayor or elected officials to determine where this tree can be planted and ask to put a small plaque beneath the tree, which can be engraved with their favorite saying or other appropriate writings.

— Organize a fundraising event to raise money for a charity. My favorite is the Foundation for Grieving Children, which I created to assist young ones who have experienced the death of a loved one. I'd be very grateful for your monthly partnership by using the "Donate Now" button on the FGC website.

— Families pool their resources together and raise additional funds from your loved one's business colleagues, neighbors and friends to develop a scholarship program at their college. The scholarship bears their name and is given to students with the parameters you would set. If, for instance, your brother was a police officer killed in the line of duty, the scholarship might be for needy students majoring in law enforcement.

Even individuals who never attended college can be honored. How wonderful to have your parent's, spouse's, sibling's or child's name on a scholarship, especially for students whose immediate family member died while

they were attending the university and were afraid the family's reduced income would prohibit them from completing their studies and ultimately graduating. Your generosity would ensure that they could finish as scheduled.

Maybe your friend didn't attend college either and you decide to simply make a large contribution to purchase books for the university library because she was an avid reader.

— More and more families are favoring donations to universities and charities, in lieu of flowers, at the time of a loved one's death. Many families will send flowers as a gesture of respect at the time of the funeral and also send along a check later to honor that individual's chosen charity. Many bereaved persons have told me how much it meant to them to receive a beautiful condolence card explaining a donation was sent to their loved one's university, library, church or local charity.

— Some bereavement organizations have developed memorials. For a modest contribution, Parents of Murdered Children will engrave a small gold plaque with your family member's name, date of birth and date of death, which is placed on their Memorial Wall along with other victims' names. This ensures that your loved one, tragically taken from you, is never forgotten.

In some cities, monuments are erected and the bricks leading up the path to the monument are engraved with names. At the memorial and museum in Oklahoma City, commemorating the lives of each of the 168 individuals killed in the Murrah Federal Building bombing on April 19, 1995, there are 168 chairs sitting side by side, each representing one of the victims.

— Some Catholic families arrange with their local churches to have masses said specifically to remember their loved ones, either on their birthday or the anniversary of their death.

— Jewish families unveil the headstone of their loved ones on the first anniversary of their death.

— In many hospitals and hospices, a Tree of Life is prominently displayed with the engraved name of a loved one on each of the tree's leaves.

It doesn't matter how you memorialize your loved one, the important thing is that you do so in a manner that will help others.

## *Chapter IX*

### *A Final Note*

I thank you for allowing me to join you as you begin traveling down this path we call grief.

I realize this isn't a path you would have preferred taking, but nevertheless, it is the path set forth for you at this time in your life.

As you walk this road, I trust you will be kind to yourself because, somewhere along the way, you will discover a stronger, more courageous you.

A you who conquered fear, uncertainty, sadness, guilt, anger, resentment, regrets, loneliness, depression and emptiness. A you who rediscovered all you could do alone and who carved out a wonderfully peaceful place to exist, perhaps somewhat different than before your loved one died. But you created it and it is good.

A you who, despite overwhelming pain, pulled it out. You rallied the help you needed and got the jobs done. All the while you worked hard to balance your needs with the needs of others.

You have survived...

And soon, it will be time to thrive again. Take the chance – it's right there waiting for you. Grab it.

## ***Chapter X***

### ***Where to Find Help: Organizations for Those Grieving a Loved One's Death***

Here is a list of national organizations that can lead you to support groups or contact persons in your area. There is no fee to participate or use their services, although please consider sending a donation to sustain their important, often volunteer, work.

#### **24 Hour National Hotlines**

The mission of these dedicated people, at the other end of these hotlines, is to help you through a difficult time. Whether you're depressed, feeling hopeless and helpless, suicidal, or need to simply talk through a horrible day when you're in crisis, I encourage you to take advantage of their help. Your conversations are confidential and will help alleviate your stress. Talking it out will help you feel you've been heard and give you perspective about whatever you are going through.

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Befrienders Worldwide

[www.befrienders.org](http://www.befrienders.org)

Working with the Samaritans, here you will find an excellent comprehensive list of crisis helplines and centers both internationally and within the USA.

## Understanding Your Grieving Heart After a Loved One's Death ~ MaryMac

CBN 700 Club  
Virginia Beach, VA  
(800) 759-0700 / [www.cbn.com](http://www.cbn.com)

Trained volunteers listen to your pain, pray with you and offer hope from a Christian perspective.

Contact USA  
Harrisburg, PA  
(800) 273-8255 / [www.contact-usa.org](http://www.contact-usa.org)

Offers referrals to local hotlines throughout the United States, which provide trained volunteers to listen to your pain 24 hours a day as well as support group and counseling referrals in your community.

Girls and Boys Town National Hotline USA  
Boys Town, NE  
(800) 448-3000 / [www.boystown.org](http://www.boystown.org)

Trained volunteers assist young people and their parents with their problems 24 hours per day, every day.

National Hopeline Network  
(800) SUICIDE / (800) 273-8255 / [www.suicidehotlines.com](http://www.suicidehotlines.com)

An excellent comprehensive website to suicide hotlines in the United States, Canada and other international countries and toll-free immediate assistance. You do not need to be suicidal to speak with their counselors. If you are having a challenging day, they are happy to listen. They can also refer you to help in your community for your specific type of grief.

Suicide Information and Education Centre  
Calgary, AB, Canada  
(403) 245-3900 / [www.suicideinfo.ca/support/canada](http://www.suicideinfo.ca/support/canada)

Provides support and extensive list of local suicide prevention crisis centers throughout Canada for both adults and children.

TeenLine Hotline Help Center  
(714) 639-8336 / [www.teenline.org](http://www.teenline.org)

Located in Southern California, assistance is available to teens Monday through Saturday, 4:00 pm to 10 pm Pacific Time.

#### Youth America Hotline

(877) 968-8454 / (877) YOUTHLINE / [www.youthline.us](http://www.youthline.us)

Peer to Peer hotline network which links callers to community-based peer counseling hotlines throughout the USA. Offers live chat with professional trained crisis prevention counselor.

### **Death of a Child**

Alive Alone, Inc.

Van Wert, OH

(419) 238-7879 / [www.alivealone.org](http://www.alivealone.org)

Network of parents whose only child or all their children have died.

Bereaved Parents of the USA

Park Forest, IL and Lewisburg, WV

(708) 748-7866 / [www.bereavedparentsusa.org](http://www.bereavedparentsusa.org)

Offers information, referrals, newsletter, phone support and conferences for families grieving the death of a child.

Committee to Halt Useless College Killings

Sayville, NY

(631) 567-1130

Supports families whose child has died through hazing or alcohol on college campuses.

The Compassionate Friends

Oak Brook, IL

(630) 990-0010 / (877) 969-0010 / [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

Assists families who have experienced the death of a child in any manner. Support groups and contact persons nationwide.

### **Death of an Infant Child**

Center for Loss in Multiple Birth (CLIMB), Inc.

Palmer, AK

(907) 746-6123 / (907) 274-7029 / [www.climb-support.org](http://www.climb-support.org)

Support by and for parents who have experienced the death of one or more, both or all twins, triplets or higher multiples during pregnancy, at birth, in infancy or in childhood.

Understanding Your Grieving Heart After a Loved One's Death ~ MaryMac

First Candle

Baltimore, MD

(800) 221-7437 / [www.firstcandle.org/grieving-families](http://www.firstcandle.org/grieving-families)

Assists families whose infant has died from stillbirth, crib death/SIDS, or other sudden unexpected infant death. Referrals to local affiliate support groups and contact persons nationwide.

Hannah's Prayer

Auburn, CA

(682) 365-4308 / [www.hannah.org](http://www.hannah.org)

Christian organization for those who have experienced infertility, miscarriage, stillbirth or other infant loss.

Mothers in Sympathy and Support (MISS)

Peoria, AZ

(623) 979-1000 / (888) 455-MISS / [www.misschildren.org](http://www.misschildren.org)

Assistance for those who have experienced miscarriage and infant death.

SHARE Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support, Inc.

St. Charles, MO

(800) 821-6819 / (636) 947-6164 / [www.nationalshare.org](http://www.nationalshare.org)

Provides support and the positive resolution of grief following the death of a baby through miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, stillbirth or neonatal death. Referrals to support groups and contact persons nationwide.

Canadian Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths

St. Catharines, ON, Canada

(905) 688-8884 / (800) 363-7437 / [www.sidscanada.org/bereave](http://www.sidscanada.org/bereave)

Provides assistance and referrals to support groups in Canada for those grieving the death of a baby by stillbirth, crib death/SIDS and other sudden unexpected infant death.

Assistance to families who have experienced the crib death of a child.

Tender Hearts Support/The Triplet Connection

Stockton, CA

(209) 474-0885 / [www.tripleconnection.org](http://www.tripleconnection.org)

Offers packet of information for families who have lost one or more triplets, quadruplets or quintuplets.

## **General Bereavement**

Adult Sibling Grief

[www.adultsiblinggrief.com](http://www.adultsiblinggrief.com)

Assists adults who have experienced the death of a brother or sister including chat room.

Air Craft Casualty Emotional Support Services (ACCESS)

New York, NY

(877) 227-6435 / [www.accesshelp.org](http://www.accesshelp.org)

Assists families and friends of air disaster victims and survivors.

**Ask Mary Mac – When You've Experienced a Loved One's Death**

[www.askmarymac.com](http://www.askmarymac.com)

Extensive website and blog for those grieving the death of a loved one.

Grief Share

[www.griefshare.org](http://www.griefshare.org)

Offers seminars and referrals to support groups in the USA from a Christian perspective.

Rivendell

[www.rivendell.org](http://www.rivendell.org)

GriefNet offers email support groups for all types of grief, serving both adults and children.

Twinless Twins Support Group, International

Leo, IN

(888) 205-8962 / [www.twinlesstwins.org](http://www.twinlesstwins.org)

Offers support to twins and all multiple births, who have suffered the death of their twin, triplet, etc. Assists in networking with others who share common experiences. Publishes newsletter.

Wings of Light, Inc.

Phoenix, AZ

(800) 613-8531 / [www.wingsoflight.org](http://www.wingsoflight.org)

Assists survivors of aircraft accidents and those who have lost loved ones in aircraft accidents. Networking with others nationwide who have experienced similar loss.



## **Grieving Children**

### **Foundation for Grieving Children, Inc.**

[www.foundationforgrievingchildren.org](http://www.foundationforgrievingchildren.org)

[www.foundationforgrievingchildren.org/blog](http://www.foundationforgrievingchildren.org/blog)

[www.foundationforgrievingchildren.org/blog/heart-of-gold-day/](http://www.foundationforgrievingchildren.org/blog/heart-of-gold-day/)

The first national public charity designed to raise funds for the benefit of grieving children, teens, young adults and their families after a loved one's death. Encourage donations and remembers loved ones on Heart of Gold Day! Blog to educate about the challenges of grieving children, and comprehensive list of local grief support services in the USA from the National Directory of Bereavement Support Groups and Services.

### **Kids Aid**

[www.kidsaid.com](http://www.kidsaid.com)

Safe place for children and teens to share their feelings with each other through email support groups.

### **National Center for Grieving Children and Families**

Portland, OR

(503) 775-5683 / [www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)

Associated with the Dougy Center, offers training programs for individuals and organizations who wish to serve the emotional needs of grieving children.

## **Homicide/Vehicular Homicide/Military**

### **Concerns of Police Survivors (COPS)**

Camdenton, MO

(573) 346-4911 / [www.nationalcops.org](http://www.nationalcops.org)

Assists families whose loved ones were killed in the line of duty. Support groups and contact persons nationwide.

### **Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)**

Irving, TX

(800) 438-6233 / (214) 744-6233 / [www.madd.org](http://www.madd.org)

Assists those who have experienced the drunk driving death of a family member or friend. Referrals to support groups and contact persons nationwide.

National Organization for Victim Assistance

Washington, DC

(800) 879-6682 / (703) 535-6682 / [www.try-nova.org](http://www.try-nova.org)

Offers crisis intervention, counseling, crisis response training and technical assistance for victims and survivors of violent crimes and disasters.

Parents of Murdered Children

Cincinnati, OH

(513) 721-5683 / [www.pomc.org](http://www.pomc.org)

Assists families after the murder of a loved one. Referrals to support groups and contact persons.

RID-USA, Inc. (Remove Intoxicated Drivers)

RID Victim Center

Schenectady, NY

(518) 372-0034 / 393-HELP / [www.rid-usa.org](http://www.rid-usa.org)

Referrals to support group meetings and contact persons who have experienced the death of a loved one in a drunk driving crash.

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, Inc. (TAPS)

Anchorage, AK and Washington, DC

(800) 959-8277 / (202) 588-8277 / [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org)

Provides peer support for survivors of military line-of-duty deaths. Referrals to support groups and contact persons nationwide.

## **Organ/Tissue Donation**

National Donor Family Council / National Kidney Foundation

New York, NY

(800) 622-9010 or (212) 889-2210 / [www.donorfamily.org](http://www.donorfamily.org)

Offers education and bereavement support group referrals for those who have become donor families.

## **Pet Loss**

These organizations assist adults and children whose precious pet is either terminally ill or has died.

ASPCA Pet Loss Support Hotline  
New York, NY  
(877) 474-3310 / [www.aspca.org/pet-care/pet-loss/](http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/pet-loss/)

Cornell University Pet Loss Support Hotline  
Ithaca, NY  
(607) 253-3932 / <http://www.vet.cornell.edu/Org/PetLoss/>  
Available for calls Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings from  
6:00 – 9:00 pm EST.

Iams Pet Loss Support Center and Hotline  
(888) 332-7738 / [www.iams.com/iams/pet-health/pet-loss-support.jsp](http://www.iams.com/iams/pet-health/pet-loss-support.jsp)  
This manufacturer of premium pet food offers assistance for grieving pet  
lovers Monday through Friday, 9:00 am – 5:00 pm EST.

Michigan State University College of Veterinary Medicine  
Pet Loss Support Hotline  
East Lansing, MI  
(517) 432-2696  
<http://cvm.msu.edu/alumni-friends/information-for-animal-owners/pet-loss-support/pet-loss-support-hotline/>  
Available for calls Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings from  
6:30 – 9:30 pm EST. Summer Hours: Tuesday and Thursdays, same hours.

Tufts University Pet Loss Support Hotline  
North Grafton, MA  
(508) 839-7966 / [www.tufts.edu/vet/petloss/](http://www.tufts.edu/vet/petloss/)  
Available for calls Monday through Friday evenings from  
6:00 – 9:00 pm EST. Summer hours vary; call for further information.

University of Florida Pet Loss Support Hotline  
Gainesville, FL  
(352) 392-2235 / <http://www.vetmed.ufl.edu/patientcare/petlosssupport/>  
Leave a message and someone will call you back within 24 hours.  
Weekend calls will be returned on Mondays.

University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine  
C.A.R.E. Pet Loss Support Hotline  
Urbana-Champaign, IL  
(877) 394-2273 / (217) 244-2273 / <http://vetmed.illinois.edu/CARE/>

Available for calls Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings from  
7:00 – 9:00 pm EST.

Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicine

Pet Loss Support

Pullman, WA

(866) 266-8635 / (509) 335-5704 / <http://www.vetmed.wsu.edu/PLHL/>

Phones are staffed Monday through Thursday and Saturdays PST. You may leave a message 24 hour per day and it will be returned as soon as possible.

[www.petloss.com](http://www.petloss.com)

A compassionate site for those anticipating or enduring the loss of a beloved pet. Excellent list of Grief Counselors at [www.petloss.com/phones.htm](http://www.petloss.com/phones.htm).

## **Suicide**

American Association of Suicidology

Washington, DC

(800) SUICIDE / (202) 237-2280 / [www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)

Offers referrals to suicide survivor groups nationwide. (800) SUICIDE provides toll-free, 24-hour access to crisis intervention/suicide prevention services.

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

New York, NY

(888) 333-2377 / (212) 363-3500 / [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)

Provides information and referrals to survivor support groups nationwide.

Friends for Survival, Inc.

Sacramento, CA

(916) 392-0664 / [www.friendsforsurvival.org](http://www.friendsforsurvival.org)

Publishes newsletter. Offers referrals to local support groups and resources.

HEARTBEAT

Colorado Springs, CO

(719) 596-2575 / [www.heartbeatsurvivorsaftersuicide.org](http://www.heartbeatsurvivorsaftersuicide.org)

Referrals to Heartbeat chapters and counseling resources for survivors of a loved one's suicide.

Suicide Information and Education Centre (SIEC)

Calgary, AB, Canada

(403) 245-3900 / [www.suicideinfo.ca/siec](http://www.suicideinfo.ca/siec)

SIEC is a special library and resource center providing support group referrals and information to survivors of suicide.

## **The Widowed**

National Association of Military Widows

Arlington, VA

(703) 527-4565

Provides referral services and support groups to the newly widowed.

Society of Military Widows

Springfield, VA

(800) 842-3451 / [www.militarywidows.org](http://www.militarywidows.org)

Serves the interests of women whose military husbands have died.

The Widowed Persons Service

AARP/American Association of Retired Persons

Washington, DC

(202) 434-2260 / [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)

Offers support groups and contact persons nationwide to assist those who have been widowed.

## ***Chapter XI***

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## *About the Author*

Mary M. McCambridge survived the deaths of two high school friends to drunk drivers, two college friends to inoperable cancers, but it was the murder of her former husband's 11 year-old daughter, Angela, in 1984 only three months before her wedding, which caused her concentration in the field of bereavement.

After attending and becoming very active in the Long Island chapter for many years, they began the first Parents of Murdered Children chapter in New York City in 1992. To help educate families and professionals, Mary developed and wrote monthly newsletters, counseled newly bereaved families, trained criminal justice and law enforcement professionals to the needs of survivors, and served as crime victim advocate, attending numerous murder trials with surviving family members. As a founding board member of Justice For All, a political action committee, she successfully lobbied New York State elected officials for more effective laws for crime victims.

To help bereaved families locate resources, she developed *The National Directory of Bereavement Support Groups and Services* which was awarded Best New Directory, First Edition by SIMBA's Excellence in Directory Publishing Awards in 1995.

In addition to the highly acclaimed *Understanding Your Grieving Heart After a Loved One's Death*, she is also the author of the audiotapes *Homicide: Understanding The Unique and Complex Challenges Survivors Face* and *Surviving the Holidays and Other Significant Events After a Loved One's Death*. She has appeared on numerous radio and television shows and was profiled in the *New York Daily News*. She has been honored by New York State Senate Legislative Resolution for her work with Survivors of Homicide Victims.

As a result of the frustration she experienced in not finding consistent help for bereaved young people, she developed the Foundation for Grieving Children, Inc., ([www.f4gc.org](http://www.f4gc.org)) the first national public charity of its kind, which raises funds and provides grants to community-based organizations which assist, educate, counsel and comfort bereaved children, teens, young adults and their families.

In April, 2009, she received the Healing Hands Award from A Caring Hand for dedication in the field of childhood bereavement, and, in June, 2009, the Frank J. O'Hara Award from the University of Scranton, the highest award bestowed on its alumni, in recognition of distinguished achievement in Community Service.

Her personal website and blog, [www.AskMaryMac.com](http://www.AskMaryMac.com) supports the needs of the bereaved worldwide. She is also a speaker, trainer, and bereavement consultant to corporate executives and private individuals.

She holds a Bachelor's degree from the University of Scranton and an MBA from Fordham University.

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If you are a grief specialist, human resources professional or other individual who comes in contact or assists the bereaved and would like to receive various articles from me, please send an email to [griefspecialist@aweber.com](mailto:griefspecialist@aweber.com)