Resilience and the Grieving Process

There is so much helpful literature about handling grief and loss. Much of it is written by those who have experienced major loss firsthand and shares their lessons. Dr. Marjorie Blanchard, a motivational consultant, shared her insights after fire swept through her California neighborhood and she lost her home of 25 years. She reminds us of the human capacity for resilience.

Even in nature when there is, say, a wildfire, avalanche or even a volcanic eruption (Mt. St. Helens) where at first there seems total destruction, in short time life returns. Beginning with soil organisms, small plant life, bugs, then more vegetation, trees, and wildlife the environment returns – not as before, but different. Nature and humans have the resilience to return to a “new normal” after a tragedy.

Dr. Blanchard shares these points from her experience*:

Realize that after the initial shock, the "daze" period will last a while. Don't deny your feelings. Allow yourself to grieve and be kind to yourself.

When a loved-one has died, shock is a natural process that helps you minimize the immensity of your loss. Your emotional/physical/psychological system can only take so much at once. If you feel in a “daze” it’s because your body has an automatic process to blunt the blow just experienced until the healing process can begin. Some people in grief-shock describe it as “sleep walking” or “just going through the motion but not present”. This is normal.

Once the initial shock begins to lift, sadness, sorrow and grief may come flooding in. When first feeling grief your first response natural response may be to avoid or deny such unpleasant feelings – as if you really could. There is a saying that the best way to get over your grief is through it. Feel your grief, in small doses if you must. Grieving takes a lot of energy and time. Kindly allow time to grieve.

Accept help when it's offered; learn to receive graciously. People really want to help.

People mean well when they want to help the grieving but may not know how. They’ll say, “Call me if you need anything at all”, but you may not even have the energy to pick-up the phone. And others will just show-up to listen to your grief without answers or advise - there are none. These people are gold. Receive them as “companions” through your grief.

Expect "pin pricks"--reminders of the loss. These will happen for a long time, but will become less frequent. They are tolerable and they are part of the healing process.

Songs, pictures, special objects and memories you shared with your lost loved-one may be painful to recall in the beginning. Telling your stories and feeling the pain of what is now gone is a normal and necessary part of grief. In time, fond memories and stories is what will sustains your love for your special person long past the pain of grief.

(Continued on reverse)
Find ways to put your loss in perspective. Try to think of the bigger picture.

There is a story that a grieving mother came to the Buddha with her lifeless child and asked him to please bring her child back to life. He said he would if she could bring him mustards seeds from a home that had not been touched by death. The mother went from house to house asking for mustard seeds. At each home she went to, the householders expressed their sympathies and apologized that they too have experienced the pain of death in their home. In her sorrow the mother realized that all humans are touched by life, love, grief and loss and she released the Buddha from his promise.

Gather family and friends to memorialize the loss and talk about it together.

When someone dies the whole community mourns the loss. This has been so for eons. Memorials and funerals serve as a means to mourn together, but grief does not end after the funeral. Each person may grieve in their own way but support is gained by mourning the loss together. Annual events, holidays and family reunions can be special times to share stories and renew relationships with others who, too, may miss your deceased loved-one.

Keep your "I love yous" up to date. People are the most important.

In the busyness of “doing” life, you may forget to pause and appreciate those that you hold dear. There are numerous communication technologies these days that gives you limitless opportunity to give and receive expressions of love many times a day. Keeping in touch with those you love can lighten your heart when the heaviness of grief weighs on you.

Resilience is the positive capacity to bounce back from adversity. Just as your grief process is unique, so is your resilience. Dr. Blanchard’s suggestions come from her own experience of loss and may be reminders and supports for your own grief journey.


Events

**Weekly Grief Support Groups**

Free, ongoing support groups for anyone who has recently experienced the death of a loved-one. Come join others in a caring supportive setting with a trained bereavement specialist.

**Every Tuesday Evening**
7:00-8:30 PM

**Every Wednesday Afternoon**
2:00-3:30 PM

Health Education Center
3333 Squalicum Parkway
Bellingham

**Spirituality and End-of-life Care**

Hospice Foundation of America’s
Free 18th Annual Living with Grief Program
For Professionals
http://www.hospicefoundation.org

**Wednesday, April 13th 1:30-5 PM**
Health Education Center
3333 Squalicum Parkway, Bellingham
Continue Education Units available
360-733-5877

**Annual Service of Memory**

A gathering to honor and remember those we love who have died. The program includes music, candle lighting, reflections and reading of names.
Refreshments provided.

**Sunday May 1, 3-4 PM**
Health Education Center
3333 Squalicum Parkway, Bellingham

Please bring pictures and memory objects for the memory table. Notify Whatcom Hospice if you would like to have your loved one’s name read during the program.

Please invite friends and family to join you to this free event. For more information, please call 360-733-5877 or email jrobinson2@peacehealth.org

If you have comments, suggestions, or would like to submit a poem or article, please contact Bereavement Coordinator, John Robinson, at Whatcom Hospice 360-733-5877 or E-mail: jrobinson2@peacehealth.org