

The Journey of Grieving



Yale University Chaplain's Office

When you lose someone you love, your life becomes strange,
The ground beneath you gets fragile, your thoughts make your eyes unsure;
And some dead echo drags your voice down
Where words have no confidence.

Your heart has grown heavy with loss;
And though this loss has wounded others too,
No one knows what has been taken from you
When the silence of absence deepens.

Flickers of guilt kindle regret
For all that was left unsaid or undone.

There are days when you wake up happy;
Again inside the fullness of life,
Until the moment breaks
And you are thrown back onto the black tide of loss.

Days when you have your heart back,
You are able to function well
Until in the middle of work or encounter,
Suddenly with no warning, you are ambushed by grief.

It becomes hard to trust yourself.
All you can depend on now is that sorrow will remain faithful to itself.
More than you, it knows its way and will find the right time
To pull and pull the rope of grief until that coiled hill of tears
Has reduced to its last drop.

Gradually, you will learn acquaintance with the invisible form of your departed;
And when the work of grief is done, the wound of loss will heal
And you will have learned to wean your eyes from that gap in the air
And be able to enter the hearth in your soul where your loved one
Has awaited your return
All the time.

from *To Bless the Space Between Us* by John O'Donohue

Some emotions and reactions during your grieving process may include:

grief that feels all-absorbing

exhaustion

social isolation

loss of appetite

difficulty sleeping or more tired than usual

good days and bad days, waves of grief that come and go

the sense that nothing is right

forgetfulness, difficulty concentrating

change in family dynamics

emotional numbness

flashbacks

explosive emotions

relief

guilt or confusion

disbelief

panic or anxiety

life feels out of control

anger

indifference

Times that can be tough:

Anniversaries

Birthdays, wedding anniversaries, one-year anniversary of the death, special days in your family

Religious Holidays

Christmas, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Passover, Hanukah, Ramadan, Easter, etc.

Other holidays

Thanksgiving, Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day

Special Family Occasions

Weddings, graduations, bar & bat mitzvahs, reunions, vacations

Academic Calendar

Start of each semester, midterms & final exams

A Process for Dealing with Grief

adapted from *Praying Out Goodbyes* by Joyce Rupp

Recognition Begin by identifying and naming the loss, as well as the hurt or pain that has accompanied it.

Who am I remembering today? How would I describe the place I find myself now?

Reflection Take time to reflect. Slow down, find solitude or the company of a trusted friend, be still, pray. Try to face the loss rather than staying busy as a way of avoidance.

How will I take time to remember my loved one today? Do I need to spend some time alone, or would conversation with someone else be helpful today?

Ritualization Create a personal ritual that honors the loss. This may include a symbol of an image, or some kind of movement or activity.

Is there a meaningful place where I have found comfort in the past (nature, a religious site, etc)?

Reorientation Welcome the healing process, accepting change and new perspectives.

What helps you get up in the morning? What small things have helped you find hope?

When to seek help:

- It is normal to experience some degree of sleeplessness or some diminishing of appetite when in acute grief. If you find you just cannot get out of bed, or if it gets to a point where your physical health is suffering, please seek a doctor's help.
- Noticeable weight gain or loss
- Difficulty in making or keeping social engagements
- High anxiety, either in intense periods or ongoing
- Continuing flashbacks
- If grief is disrupting your family commitments
- A number of deaths in short succession
- All bad days over weeks and weeks
- If you have suicidal thoughts of any kind
- Increased self-destructive behavior (alcohol, sex, drugs) to avoid grief
- If your normal faith rituals are disturbed (can't pray, don't want to go to worship for extended periods of time)
- If grief becomes an obstacle to your work and your love
- When you don't care about anything
- If you find yourself so consumed by the past that you are unable to make any changes. If after the first year you find you are opposing any and all changes in life, seek the help of others.
- If you don't know how to interpret your emotional reactions
- Conflict in your relationships

Where to Seek Help:

Yale Mental Health & Counseling: Every Yale student is entitled to counseling at the Yale University Health Services (YUHS) Mental Health and Counseling Center completely free of charge, regardless of your health plan. Call (203) 432-0290 for an appointment. Mental health professionals are available 24/7 for emergency and urgent situations. After office hours and on weekends, call (203) 432-0123.

Yale University Chaplain's Office: (203) 432-1128. Call if you would like to talk with a staff member about your journey of grief or any other topic (religious or not), or if would you like help connecting with a local faith community or health professional.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Alanon, Alateen New Haven Area
Answering Service: 203-624-6063 or 1-800-203-1234

Narcotics Anonymous (NA): 1-800-627-3543

Connecticut Hospice: (203) 315-7500, <http://www.hospice.com/>

Breathing Space: Breathing Space is open for personal prayer and meditation on Sunday from 4:00pm – 10:00pm, Monday to Thursday 9:00am – 10:00pm and Friday from 9:00am – 5:00pm. Breathing Space is located under Entryway C of Welch Hall on Old Campus. Call the Chaplain's Office for more info: (203) 432-1128.

Contact your faith community for other important resources and guidance.

What Now?

the grieving process does not have a script

find a sacred space

try to use the most direct words you can

try writing a letter to the person who has died

try to avoid secrets

eventually you will be able to consider new directions for yourself

light physical exercise: walking or gardening

tender balance: do not change anything until you are ready,

but also do not try to keep everything the same.

ask for help negotiating this.

commemorate your loved one's memory

try to leave some margins in your schedule so that when the grief

really ambushes you, you can take some time to recover

continued on next page...

sustaining yourself physically:

if it's difficult to eat – eat what you can

if it's difficult to sleep – trust your body to rest when it must

if bad news is everywhere – don't watch the news for awhile

be careful with sleeping pills, alcohol and other sedatives

actively negotiate with your professors regarding deadlines and timing of your work; advocate for your own need to grieve

anticipate difficult dates and consider how to best spend those days:

anniversaries, birthdays, weddings, graduations, etc.

try to notice what helps you get through the day, however small

Recommended Reading

Getting Grief Right: Finding Your Story of Love in the Sorrow of Loss by Patrick O'Malley and Tim Madigan, Sounds True, Inc., 2017.

Modern Loss by Rebecca Soffer and Gabrielle Birkner, Harper Collins, 2018.

Grieving: A Beginner's Guide by Jerusha Hull McCormack, Paraclete Press, 2005.

Life is Goodbye, Life is Hello: Grieving Well Through All Kinds of Loss by Alla Renee Bozarth. Hazelden Press, 1994.

The Year of Magical Thinking by Joan Didion, Vintage, 2005.

Good Grief: A Constructive Approach to the Problem of Loss by Granger E. Westberg, Augsburg Fortress Press.

A Grief Observed by C.S. Lewis, Harper San Francisco, 2001.

Lament for a Son by Nicholas Wolterstorff, Eerdmans Publishing, 1987.

Finding Your Way Through Grief by Karen Katafiasz, Abbey Press, 1995.

Walking with God Through Grief and Loss by Joyce Rupp, Abbey Press, 1990.

Death of a Parent:

Losing a Parent: Passage to a New Way of Living by Alexandra Kennedy, Harper, 1991.

Mature Grief: When a Parent Dies by Donna Schaper, Cowley Publications, 2002.

Last Touch: Preparing for a Parent's Death by Marilyn R. Becker, M.S.W., New Harbinger Publications, 1992.

Death of a Child:

Empty Arms: Coping After Miscarriage, Stillbirth, or Neonatal Death by Sherokee Ilse, Wintergreen Press.

After the Death of a Child: Living With Loss Through the Years by Ann K. Finkbeiner, The Free Press, 1996.

Sudden or Tragic Death:

Living With Grief After Sudden Loss: Suicide, Homicide, Accident, Heart Attack, Stroke, edited by Kenneth J. Dorka, Hospice Foundation of America, 1996.

After Suicide by John H. Hewett, Westminster Press, 1980.

Listen more often to things than to beings; The fire's voice is heard, Hear the voice of water. Hear in the wind the bush sob: It is the ancestors' breath.

Those who have died have never left, they are in the brightening shadow and in the thickening shadow; The dead are not under the earth, they are in the rustling tree, they are in the groaning woods, they are in the flowing water, they are in the still water, they are in the hut, they are in the crowd: The dead are not dead.

Listen more often to things than to beings; The fire's voice is heard, Hear the voice of water. Hear in the wind the bush sob: It is the ancestors' breath, the breath of dead ancestors who have not left, who are not under the earth, who are not dead. Those who have died have never left, they are in the woman's breast, they are in the wailing child and in the kindling firebrand. The dead are not under the earth, they are in the fire dying down, they are in the moaning rock, they are in the crying grass, they are in the forest, they are in the home: The dead are not dead.

- by Birago Diop in Life Prayers From Around the World.