



APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN

Counseling and Family Services

515 Highland Street, Morton, IL 61550 ♦ Tel: (309) 263-5536 Fax: (309) 263-6841 ♦ www.accounseling.org

GRIEF/LOSS, PART 3

Grief/Loss, Part 1 was written for those who are grieving and was printed in the September, 2009, Silver Lining. Part 2 was focused on how to help grieving people soon after their loss and was printed in the November, 2009, issue. This article, Part 3, is also focused on how to help grieving people in the long term—in the following months and years.

Isaiah 40:1 *“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.”* How can you extend comfort? How can you understand what grieving people go through in the months and years following their losses?

Some people need more time to grieve than others. In the months after the loss, life for grieving people gradually starts to fall into a different pattern—a pattern that now has to include the absence of their loved one. This pattern, however, is interrupted by the changing seasons, by important family dates—anniversaries, birthdays, vacations, baptisms, weddings, etc. Some people experience great sadness during these special times because they are reminders that their loved one is not with them. Grieving parents who lost babies or very young children may need more time to grieve than society “allows.” Their intense grief period usually averages 18 to 24 months. These parents will go through ups and downs during that time. The future holds many milestones that will be missed, such as the first day of kindergarten, Sunday School programs, or getting a driver’s license. Each event may bring tears to parents. Yet these milestones may have disappeared or been forgotten to others.

How can you offer your support at these times? Extended family, close acquaintances, and others who have gone through similar experiences need to know the grieving people. Do they want to be alone during those special, now sad times? Do they want to be with friends away from their home? Do they want to be with just their own family but not alone? Ask them to find out.

Grieving people need a safe person and/or place to talk about the feelings they are experiencing. They need to be heard without being judged or receiving unwanted advice. Allow them to talk openly. Acknowledge their grief and remember with them.

There are other practical things to do. It is ok to send “thinking-of-you” cards with short encouraging notes every now and then for a very long time. It makes grieving people feel they are not forgotten. It is also good to send poems or Bible verses offering comfort and hope or comments on special memories of the departed one. Many grieving people welcome phone calls. Sometimes the house gets too quiet for them. They want to hear that the calling person is thinking of them and praying for them. Don’t assume that because your grieving friends are having a good day that it means they are over their loss. They may be ok one minute but the next minute may hit bottom. Grief work takes time--sometimes much longer than anyone wants it to take. The second year may be difficult for them, too. It continues to be wise NOT to ask, “How are you?” or “How are you doing?” Rather make a comment such as, “I haven’t forgotten your loss,” or “I’m continuing to pray for you.” If you have not gone through a loss, please do not say, “I know how you feel.” Grieving people stated that they can sense from the handshake or hug whether the supporting person has also gone through a loss. Just tell them you will continue to pray for them. Even though ahead of time couples may try to prepare for death, until death

actually occurs, there is no way to describe the tearing apart of the “oneness” of a marriage union. One widow stated that you cannot visualize what is ahead. After the loss she felt like she was functioning as “1/2 a person.” The grieving person feels as though he/she is in a lost world for many, many months. One grieving person stated that the word, “comfort,” took on a whole new, deeper meaning during her grief period.

What are other things you can do? Periodically, invite grieving friends on outings with you—a trip to the library, to a restaurant, to the grocery store, on a bus trip, to go shopping, etc. Extended family may want to include them on family vacations. Monthly outings give them something to look forward to. Some widows have included others in their groups. One widow stated that she was in three groups and looked forward to the conversations and just doing something different. A widower stated that he felt blessed that he could go to work and had something to look forward to regularly. Even after eight months since his loss, his friends were still inviting him for meals and then sending the leftovers home with him for three more meals. Even 20 years after a loss, one widow stated that still did not feel comfortable attending a large function alone. She wanted to walk in with someone she knew and sit with someone she knew. She particularly mentioned attending benefit dinners. Yes, she calls others; but it is very comforting for her to be called. No matter what your status is, single brother or sister, widow or widower, married couple, you could invite a person living alone to attend a function with you.

When a grieving person starts visiting other churches, it is comforting for those he/she meets to mention something about the departed loved one. The grieving person appreciates hearing, “I thought about you,” or “I was praying for you.” One widower stated that it was a humbling experience and very welcome.

How do widows and widowers feel about seeing other couples engaged in conversations or walking hand in hand? It may remind some of their loss. One widower stated that he is happy for that couple—that they still have each other.

Use your imaginations to find other things to do with and for grieving people. Open your day in prayer and ask the Holy Spirit for direction. Include grieving people in your list of those you pray for regularly. If God lays on your heart something to do for a grieving person, do it in love. Luke 6:31 *“And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.”* We do not know when it will be “our turn” to be the receiver of comfort.

Some comments taken from: “Ways to Support a Parent Whose Baby Has Died,” Pamphlet, 2004, National SHARE Office, St. Joseph Health Center, 300 First Capitol Drive, St. Charles, MO 63301-2893.

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