

An Episcopalian thinks about
A Different Kind of Grief



Someone
I Know
Has Died
Suddenly



For Teenagers and Their Parents

This booklet has been written by an Episcopalian and from a Christian point of view. It is my hope that the information might help you understand some things about grief and to offer some help in getting through it.

You may be reading this because someone you know has died suddenly. The person might have been a family member, a close friend or someone you knew only a little bit.

When people we know die, it is a normal thing to grieve. Grieving is a process and has been compared to being on a journey. If you are a Christian, you may believe or been told that you should not be sad because the person who has died has gone to be with God and is alive in Him. While this is true – that those whose belong to Jesus Christ continue to be alive in God - , it does not change the grief we feel. Grief is never unchristian and is a measure of our love for the one who has died. After all, Jesus cried at the grave of his friend , Lazarus. The Bible has much to say about the experience of grief and the Christian hope in the face of death. At the end of this brochure are included some prayers and other resources that you may find helpful.

Sometimes, when a person we care for has died suddenly, we may have a different kind of grief called traumatic grief. Traumatic grief is very different kind of journey and is much harder to get through than normal grief. People experiencing traumatic grief may have continuing difficulties that interfere with their ability to live a good life and to have good memories of the person who died.

What is Grief?

While everyone grieves in their own way and at their own speed, normal grief may include:

Emotional reactions : crying or feeling tearful at unexpected times, feeling sad, angry, anxious, numb, lonely, guilty, powerless, ashamed, insecure, and remorseful

Changes in behaviors : losing interest in our usual activities, not taking care of our bodies, feeling angry, being aggressive or irritable towards other people, impulsivity, going backwards to more childlike or baby-like behaviors, changes in sleeping patterns (such as increased sleep, insomnia. or not being able to sleep alone), changes in appetite resulting in weight gain or loss, and changes in overall physical health

Interpersonal interactions : wanting to be alone, not wanting to be with your friends , fighting with friends or other people , clinging , difficulty sharing memories, difficulty participating in group or athletic activities, and general lack of interest in others. This may also include drinking or using drugs to cover up feelings.

Changes in thinking : In normal grief , it is not unusual to think constantly about the person who has died and death itself. It is not

unusual to feel that the death is unreal and we may have to frequently remind ourselves that we will not see the person again in this life. You may find yourself worrying about your own health or the health of someone close to you. Many people experience difficulty making decisions, confusion, impaired memory and concentration, lowered self-esteem and self-confidence and a loss of hope for a good life in the future. It is also not unusual to think that the death was your fault in some way or to feel guilty because you survived and the other person didn't.

Altered perceptions : Sometimes we may sense that the deceased is still present, feel the person's presence nearby or that they are watching over the living. We may see the person's face in a crowd, experience a smell associated with them, hear the person's voice, and experience vivid dreams about the person.

Physical reactions : Because the death of someone we care about is one of the most stressful human experiences, we may more easily become ill, experience a loss of energy, fatigue, difficulty or changes in eating, physical complaints, and increased heart rate, respiration, and startle response.

Changes in academic functioning for students : It is not unusual during grieving to experience poor school performance, difficulty studying or concentrating, and, sometimes, even failing at

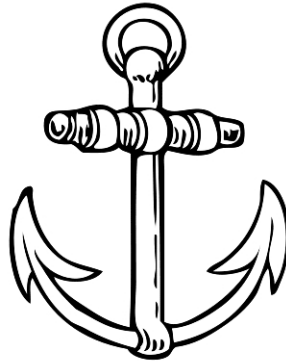
school.

All of these are normal when grieving and, in time, the most vivid thoughts and the intense feelings of sadness will get a little easier to live with. It is not that we forget the person or stop missing them, but we realize that we can go on and still have a happy life. In several faith traditions, it is customary to set aside a calendar year for grieving the loss of someone dear to you.

There is no timetable for grief and the journey of grief is more like a roller-coaster than walking on a flat, straight road

When someone we know has died in a sudden or shocking way (a traumatic event), the normal process of grieving may get "derailed" or blocked. Traumatic events may include things like acts of violence, accidents, disaster, war or sudden death from an illness. Many people who have experienced trauma develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). We can be traumatized by directly experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. Sometimes, we can be traumatized just by hearing about another person's experience with such an event. Trauma "blocks" normal grieving because the heart and mind remain psychologically and physiologically "captured" by the traumatic

event rather than the loss of the person.



What Is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

During or immediately after a traumatic event, we might experience feelings of intense fear, horror, helplessness, lack of control, and physical stress reactions such as a rapidly beating heart or shakiness. Intense feelings such as fear and helplessness are likely to be experienced in the first weeks following a traumatic event. For some people, these responses may go away naturally over time.

For many others, though, these feelings can continue indefinitely and especially when they experience a reminder of the traumatic event. Reminders can include sounds, smells, people and places that remind you of what happened.

People with PTSD often experience long-lasting changes in their ability to trust others, their sense of personal safety, their ability to deal with life challenges, and their belief that there is justice or fairness in life. They may lose a sense of hope for their future and feel fatalistic or helpless. Traumatized children and teenagers may become involved in fights or other conflicts with peers, have difficulty interacting with authority figures, become socially isolated or withdrawn, develop poor school attendance, and abuse alcohol or drugs. They may also experience depression or extreme anxiety.

PTSD is diagnosed when you have specific symptoms that continue for a month or more following exposure to a traumatic event.

Not all people exposed to a trauma will develop PTSD, but about one in three people will. Another third of that group will develop chronic PTSD. In addition to the above, some of the other signs of PTSD are:

Memories or thoughts about the death that appear suddenly and on their own: These can be repeating nightmares, daydreams, intense

feelings of guilt, or self-blame about how the person died. You may keep seeing pictures in your mind of how the person died, what they looked like at the time of the death or at their funeral.

Hyperarousal : nervous, jumpy, or agitated behavior, and hypervigilance (being on constant alert) or increased startle reaction.

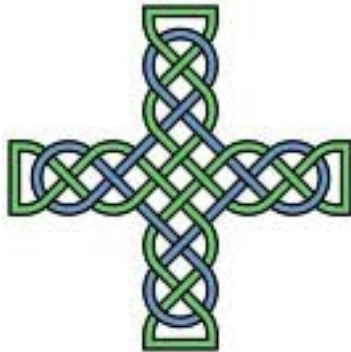
Avoidance and numbing : This is withdrawal and acting as if not upset. Sometimes, this is avoiding all reminders of the person, the way she or he died, or the event that led to the death. With numbing, we may not let ourselves feel our feelings. Some people try to use alcohol or drugs to numb their thoughts and feelings.

Physical or emotional symptoms : These can include irritability, anger, trouble sleeping, decreased concentration, drop in grades, stomachaches, headaches, increased vigilance, and fears about safety for oneself or others.

Remember

Normal Grief + Post Traumatic
Stress Disorder = Traumatic Grief

When normal grief and PTSD combine, we have what is known as traumatic grief. The problem with traumatic grief is that people are not able to move through the normal grief process. Not being able to work through grief or getting “stuck” in grief can keep us from being able to go on living, to have a good life, and good memories of the person who died.



Walking the Path of Grief

When we grieve normally, in time, we get to the point where we.....

* Accept that we will not see the person again in this lifetime. At the same time, we are more able to trust that that the one we love is alive and safely in God's care , and that we will be reunited with them at the time of our own

death.

*Are able to trust that God loves us despite any anger we may feel toward him and that God is our companion in our journey of grief.

*Can let ourselves feel and work through the painful feelings and thoughts about the death, such as sadness, anger, resentment, confusion, and guilt.

* Adjust to changes in our lives and identity that result from the death.

*Are able to treasure our happy memories of the person and do special things that help us continue to remember them. We are able to tell our favorite stories about them and to talk about them freely.

* Develop new relationships or deepen existing relationships to help us cope with the difficulties and loneliness that may have resulted from the death.

*Children and teenagers are able to continue through the normal stages of growing and becoming a healthy adult.

If, in reading this booklet, you have realized that you may have PTSD or Traumatic Grief, please talk to somebody. Talk with a family member, teacher, counselor, minister or other trusted adult. You may need to be evaluated by

and work with a counselor who has been specially trained in PTSD and Traumatic Grief. Most of all, remember that if you have been through a traumatic event....you can get help, you can heal and you can go on to have joy in your life again .

One More Thought

Many people who are grieving have found it helpful to connect or re-connect with a church or other faith community. Often, ministers have special training in how to talk with people and would be glad to talk with you. They can also help you find a counselor who can work closely with you to help you get through your hard times. Prayer and re-connecting with God helps many people during difficult times.. In faith communities, you often find members there who also have gone through terrible times and would be glad to help you through. Please, think about reaching out in this way. If you don't have a church, ask a friend or family member who does and they will be able to help you get connected.



For Parents: When to Seek Help

An evaluation by a mental-health professional is recommended if any of the following behavior is seen in a child or adolescent following a trauma:

1. Acts like absolutely nothing has happened after a crisis or serious loss.
2. School or work performance suffers or a young person fears going to school or work.
3. Hurts self intentionally or engages in high-risk behavior.
4. Withdraws and avoids friends.
5. Talks about or attempts suicide
6. Panics frequently (has intense fear for no apparent reason)
7. Physically assaults others or is cruel to animals
- 8 Starts behaving poorly with family members
9. Begins or increases involvement with alcohol or drugs
10. Has repeating upsetting dreams

The Christian Hope in the Face of Death

In the burial service found in *The Book of Common*

Prayer (Episcopal), we commend our loved ones into the keeping of a faithful God and, even as we grieve, do so “in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is this reality - God’s resurrection power as manifested in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead- that enables us to stand in the face of death and declare, “O Death, where is your victory?” For death no longer has the final power over those who are in Christ Jesus.

It is this same reality that also enables us to trust that those who pass through the grave and gate of death receive complete healing and restoration in Him, and that they live in the nearer presence of the One who created, loves and knows them perfectly. Too, that in God’s good time, we shall be reunited with them around God’s throne.

We believe that those who have entered the larger life increase in the knowledge and love of God as they go from “strength to strength in the life of perfect service” in His heavenly kingdom.

We trust that the Lord Jesus includes us in his promise when he says, “I go to prepare a place for you and I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14.3).

Above all, we can take comfort in the knowledge that all of time is moving toward the great day when God will wipe away every tear from our eyes, when death will be no more, and all things will be made new in him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Prayers

O Lord our God, from whom neither death nor life can separate those who trust in thy love, and whose love holds in its embrace thy children in this world and the next; so unite us to thyself that, in fellowship with thee, we may always be united to our loved ones whether here or there. Give us courage, constancy and hope; through him who died and was buried and rose again for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Wm Temple

**O God, who brought us to birth,
and in whose arms we die,
in our grief and shock,
contain and comfort us;
embrace us with your love,
give us hope in our confusion
and grace to let go into new life;
through Jesus Christ. *Amen.***

**God of unfailing compassion,
in your creative love and tenderness you gave us N ,
so full of hope for the future.
You are the source of all our lives,
the strength of all our days.
You did not make us for darkness and death
but to see you face to face
and to enjoy abundant life.
Help us to comfort one another
with the consolation we ourselves receive from you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen***

**Heavenly Father,
you alone can heal our broken hearts;
you alone can wipe away the tears that well up inside us;
you alone can give us the peace we need;
you alone can strengthen us to carry on.
We ask you to be near us, for our time of joy
has been turned into sadness.
Assure us that with you nothing is wasted
or incomplete,
and uphold us with your tender love.
Supported by your strength,
may our love for one another be deepened
by the knowledge of your love for us all. Amen.**

**O Lord, support us all the day, until the shadows
lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is
hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is
done. Then in thy mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a
holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen.**

**Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening into the
house and gate of heaven to enter into that gate and
dwell in that house, where there shall be no darkness nor
dazzling, but one equal light; no noise nor silence, but
one equal music; no fears nor hopes, but one equal
possession; no ends not beginnings, but one equal
eternity; in the habitation of thy glory and dominion,
world without end. Amen.**

John Donne

Bible Passages

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

**Since, therefore, the children (of the Father) share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.
Hebrews 2:14-15**

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. John 14:1-6 (KJV)

⁴²Then (*the criminal hanging beside Jesus*) said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into* your kingdom.’ ⁴³He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’ (Luke 23:39-43)

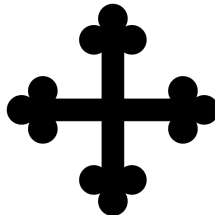
Other Sources and Resources

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network.
<http://www.nctsnet.org/nccts/>

“When to Get Help” - Sister Teresa McIntier.
Tucson Arizona, 1992

The Book of Common Prayer (1979)

**“Blessed are they who grieve, for they
will be comforted.” *Matthew 5:4***



The “*An Episcopalian thinks about....*” series is produced by the Rev. Jennie C. Olbrych and is offered as a pastoral care resource. 2006 – *Soli Deo Gloria*

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