



MID HUDSON NEW YORK CHAPTER

Bereaved Parents of the USA

Newsletter

together we remember... together we heal...

Kathy Corrigan Chapter Leader

www.mhbpusa.com

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021



Please join us for our next monthly meeting
All in-person meetings have been canceled until further notice. In the meantime, we will meet via zoom on the first Thursday of every month.
For more information, please email Kathy kjcorrigan5@gmail.com or call her at (845) 462-2825



A WARM WELCOME TO NEWCOMERS

We understand how difficult it is to attend your first meeting. Feelings can be overwhelming; we have all experienced them and know how important it is to take that first step. Our stories may be different but we are alike in that we all hurt deeply. We cannot take your pain away but we can offer friendship and support. Bring a friend or relative to lean on if you wish.

Why Do I Feel So Guilty?

By Catherine McNulty, Founder of Grief INSPIRED www.griefinspired.com

In my humble opinion, western society drastically underestimates the magnitude of grief. Losing someone you love can be one of the most traumatic events many people will face. Death and grief are challenging in so many ways. If you are here because you are lost in grief, you know what I'm talking about.

In my coaching practice, I set up weekly calls with those who are grieving. Feelings of intense guilt comes up for a lot of people. What I do is help them understand the emotion of guilt, where it comes from, and why it makes living with guilt so difficult.

Emotions can be tricky, and the mind can work in ways that don't seem to make sense. I've found it helpful to educate myself about what is happening. When I educate myself, I begin to understand the "why" behind the emotion, and it can make the emotion feel less intense. It's what works for me.

If you are feeling guilty, let me start by saying that guilt is a natural reaction to loss. You've lost someone you love. Your heart aches and your mind is constantly spinning, trying to figure out what has happened. You want to know how to make the pain stop because you don't like feeling awful. This IS grief. We all share this experience. There is nothing wrong with you. You are not alone.

THE GUILT PROCESS

As you sit with your grief, your mind begins to replay all the events you can remember leading up to the loss. You go over every detail and try to determine what you could have done differently.

You've been thrust into the unfamiliar world of grief. You want to understand why it happened and how it could have been prevented. You analyze every possible scenario to try and convince yourself that if the circumstances were different, the outcome would be different.

Your world has been turned upside down. The world you knew no longer makes sense. It's unsettling because we all want the world to make sense. When it doesn't, we feel out of sorts.

Our minds next try to process what has happened, and who is to blame. Here's why we blame. If we can blame someone, find fault, or find where things went wrong, it would be easier to make sense of what happened. I've found that most people blame others first, (which can show up as intense anger) and then begin to blame themselves. When we turn our anger inward and blame ourselves, it doesn't feel good. It hurts.

(Brene Brown says that placing blame is a way to discharge uncomfortable emotions like discomfort and pain.)

HOW TO PROCESS GUILT

Let me reiterate, feeling guilt is very normal. It is often necessary to process your grief. So, the next time you lie awake in the middle of the night, staring at the ceiling, and wondering why you can't sleep, (even though you are exhausted), you will know why. You are actively processing your grief.

Instead of thinking something is wrong or that you might be losing your mind, remind yourself that processing guilt is a necessary part of the process. Remember this. Every night you lay awake, you are moving closer to resolving the pain you feel.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

You may be asking yourself, "What can I do?" First, give yourself grace. Instead of blaming yourself, take a moment to remind yourself that hurting yourself and finding fault for what you did or didn't do, won't help.

No matter what happened, even if you were at fault, blaming yourself won't change the outcome. Also, keep in mind that you only have one perspective; your own. There are things you may not know. You can't make a judgement without having all the facts. Let go of the judgement and blame. It won't help.

What you want is to have your loved one back. You want them with you, here in this world. It hurts deeply. I'm sorry.

The second thing you can do is sit in the pain, recognize that you are feeling guilty, and remind yourself that you did the best you could at the time. Forgive yourself for what you feel you should have done. Forgive yourself for what you may have done wrong. Forgive yourself for not being better.

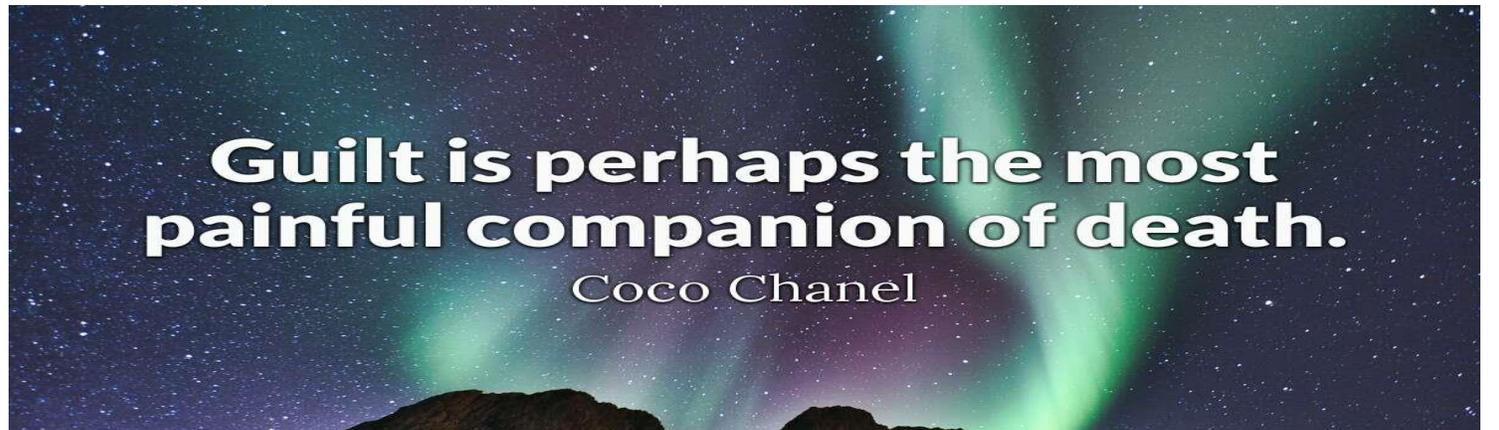
The third thing you can do is say the words, ***"Beating myself up will not bring (insert name) back. I choose to give myself grace one moment at a time."***

Then put both your hands over your heart, bow your head and say, ***"I forgive you."***

Finally, let all the emotions surface and know that each time you repeat these words, you are one step closer to resolving the pain of grief.

If you are reading this article, you are NOT ALONE anymore. I am with you in your grief. I want to help. I created Grief INSPIRED because I believe no one should have to grieve alone and that includes you.

Together we can heal, one day at a time.



**Guilt is perhaps the most
painful companion of death.**

Coco Chanel

WHEN WE BLAME OURSELVES

by Gary Roe

Guilt can be heavy.

“I know it’s my fault. Now I’m being punished. I can’t make this right. What can I do?” Melissa choked through her tears.

Melissa’s son Carter was her third child. He came out screaming, and (according to Melissa) never stopped talking. He grew like a weed.

One hot summer day, the family was in the back yard enjoying their pool. Melissa turned away for a moment. When she looked back, Carter was gone. She frantically searched before finally noticing him on the bottom of the pool. Carter was three years old.

“I should have been watching. God will never forgive me for this. And I’ll never, ever forgive myself. Because of me, Carter is dead,” she said with a cold stare.

When we feel guilty, we punish ourselves

When someone close to us dies, we can feel responsible. How could this happen? We missed something. We should have been there. We should have known.

We add guilt and remorse to the already unbearable pain of losing them. We begin to punish ourselves, consciously or subconsciously. The shame cripples us. Even if our faith is deep and solid, some of us have trouble raising our eyes to heaven, or even whispering a prayer.

Perhaps we see this tragedy as punishment for the things we did or didn’t do. Maybe we believe our loved one was taken from us because we weren’t good enough. We’ve messed up too much and crossed a line somewhere, and now God, karma, fate, or the universe has given us what we deserve.

Underneath it all is the shaky belief that if we had been better people this would not have happened. We’re bad and our loved one is dead. Forgiveness is impossible.

In grief and in life, we often confuse being responsible with being in control. That never works because it’s simply not true. We influence much, but are never “in control” when it comes to relationships, other people, or circumstances. We don’t even cause our own hearts to beat.

We aren’t perfect. Far from it. We aren’t omniscient (all-knowing) – not even close. We’re not omnipresent (everywhere at once), but limited to being in one small spot on this planet at any given time. We’re not omnipotent (all-powerful) – not by a long shot. Yet we sometimes expect ourselves to be all of these.

Whatever our belief system, it must provide somehow for the resolution of guilt. Forgiveness must be included and available, or else we are lost and without hope.

Blaming ourselves is a common reaction to some deaths. But it is not healthy, and hinders our recovery and healing.

“Part of loving and honoring you is forgiving myself. I’m working on that.”

An exercise to consider:

This exercise will take a little time. It may be emotional. That’s okay. We’re processing some tough stuff here.

Take a moment and list anything you feel responsible for related to the death of your loved one. Be as specific as possible.

Do you believe you can be forgiven? What would it look like to forgive yourself?

Write a letter or poem to your loved one expressing the guilt you feel. Be as specific as you can. Consider asking forgiveness from God, your loved one, and perhaps your family.

Now, imagine your loved one in front of you, and read this letter out loud.

When done, go back to the letter and write at the bottom, "I forgive myself." Read it out loud.

We often need to forgive ourselves over and over again, each time at a deeper level. Keep forgiving. Keep releasing yourself. This is part of healthy grieving.

Adapted from Gary's new bestseller: [*Shattered: Surviving the Loss of a Child*](#).

WHEN YOU HAVE LOST SOMEONE YOU LOVE

From *To The Women* by Donna Ashworth

Do not make the mistake of living in sadness, or living small to honor their absence. You owe it to them to live even more vividly than before. If they could reach you, they would surely say ... "Take the love you had for me and turn it into gladness, use the love you had for me to drive away the sadness."



Love is an energy, so powerful, so all-consuming that when the person you felt all that love for is not here, you are a vessel filled with a boundless source of power that has nowhere to go. Harness it. Use it to burn even more brightly and live even more loudly than before. Share the love you felt for that person with all the other special people in your life, for it is limitless. There is no end to it and there never ever should be.

If they could reach you, they would surely say ... "Make my time on earth count loudly, so I've not lived in vain. Use the love we shared to make more love and not more pain."

If you are struggling to move on, to find the way to carry on. Without them. This is it. Use the love. Carry them with you in all that you do, using their love as the source. It is what they would want. Tell their stories, mention their name, feel their love – and share it. Do not let the pain of their loss overshadow the love that they created whilst alive. Make them count.

Remember, grief is the price you pay for a love divine. The stronger the love, the deeper the grief but love, love will always win in the end.



*Remembering our
grieving grandparents
on Grandparents Day*

September 12, 2021

Finding Peace in the Dark Corners of Your Life

By Wendy Leeds www.wendyleeds.com

"The mind can go in a thousand directions, but on this beautiful path, I walk in peace. With each step, the wind blows. With each step, a flower blooms." ~Thich Nhat Nanh

It's easy to feel peaceful and positive when the sun is shining and life is going your way. It's a different matter when you're alone, afraid, sick, or so tired you have trouble getting out of bed in the morning.

As a three-time cancer survivor, I know something about getting through difficult times. I know what it's like to feel exhausted and hopeless, but I've also learned it's possible to find moments of peace and light under the most difficult of circumstances. You can too.

Here are six techniques that help me find the light when things are tough. I hope they bring you the same sense of peace and ease they bring me.

1. Stop pretending everything's okay.

If things aren't going well, acknowledge it.

Stop judging yourself for feeling tired, anxious, or miserable. Instead of yelling at yourself for not being upbeat in the face of trauma or trouble, speak to yourself with the same understanding and respect you'd use to support your friends and family.

Tell yourself you have every right to feel the way you do right now, but that feelings are like the tide. They come and go. And while things are tough today, you're tough, too. You've been through hard times before. You'll get through this, and tomorrow will be a better day.

2. Give yourself the gift of living one hour at a time.

When I was going through chemo for breast cancer, I was afraid I wouldn't have the strength to make it through the six long months of treatment. And then I came across the idea of living my life hour by hour, and that changed everything.

Here's how it works: Let's say it's 1:15 PM where you are. All you have to do is focus on doing the best you can until 2:00 PM. That's it. You don't have to worry about what's for dinner tomorrow night. You certainly aren't going to worry about that appointment you have next Tuesday, or how you're going to replace your old car.

You just have to make it through this one hour, secure in the knowledge that the next hour, and all the hours after that will take care of themselves.

It sounds simple, but living this way has seen me through some really tough days. Go ahead, give it a try, and see how this one change can make this tough time easier.

3. Focus on loving yourself.

This is a time to treat your body and spirit with fierce, loving self-care.

Listen to your body and give it what it needs to stay healthy.

Make sure you get enough rest. Go to bed early. Take a nap.

Take an afternoon off and do something that soothes your heart. Go for a walk in the woods, head to the beach, or read a good book.

Eat as well as you can, but don't beat yourself up if you don't get all your vegetables, or eat an extra piece of fudge. Move in ways that feel good to your body. And move as often as possible. Even a ten-minute walk or some gentle stretching can improve your mood.

Support your health and your spirit with loving words and actions throughout your day.

Remind yourself all day long of how many reasons and ways you have to love yourself.

My favorite way to care for myself when things are tough is to take a warm bath or shower. I love taking time alone to nurture my body and spirit. I love to relax and let the water wash away my cares and worries. For me, bathing is the perfect way to end a tough day.

4. Get busy.

Don't just sit around worrying, do something. Even if you don't have a lot of energy, you can still find something small to do to make your life better.

Clean out a drawer, or a closet. Read something. Learn something. Start a project, finish a project. Knit, tinker, build, garden, write, explore, give, share.

I like to go for a walk or head to the kitchen to cook something, but it doesn't matter what you do. What matters is that you take one small action to get you back on the road to feeling better.

5. Be grateful.

Take some time every day to focus on all the wonderful things you already have in your life.

Even though you may feel you have nothing to be grateful for, I promise you, you are surrounded by an abundance of miracles. The trick is to seek out the little luxuries in your day, the moments of unexpected joy, the color, sound, and beauty of the world around you. Find them and then to celebrate them all with a full heart.

As you go through your day, look for things that feel good. Revel in things like the warmth and comfort of a quilt around your shoulders, the beat of your favorite music, the splendor of the morning sky, the juicy sweetness of a crisp apple.

See how many of these incredible things you can find. Make it a game to find more of those things today than you did yesterday. Play the game with people around you and see how this one simple activity changes your life.

If you're still having trouble coming up with the good things in your life, complete these phrases:

I enjoy seeing...

I enjoy hearing....

I enjoy doing....

I enjoy knowing....

I enjoy being with....

I'm so glad about....

I love....

I'm so glad I can....

I'm grateful for...

I'm looking forward to...

When you start looking for, and talking about, things you're grateful for, you'll begin to welcome more of those wonderful things into your life.

6. Look up and breathe.

Finally, when you're anxious, depressed, or at your wit's end, all you have to do to instantly feel better is look up. Simply raise your gaze to the sky or ceiling or whatever is over your head. Take a moment to feel a connection to the universe.

Then draw a breath deep into your belly. As you continue to breathe deeply, feel a sense of relaxation begin in your shoulders and work its way down your spine. Feel your muscles soften as a sense of ease fills your body.

With your next inhale, repeat the phrase, "I now fill my body with peace and light." As you exhale, feel your body soften and relax as you repeat to yourself, "I let go of the weight of fear and worry."

Repeat until you are completely relaxed. Then take that sense of peace into your day, knowing you can repeat this technique as many times as you wish to bring this sense of peace into your heart, no matter what is going on around you.

It may not be possible to avoid the dark days in life, but it's always possible to bring some light into that darkness and peace into your soul, by choosing acceptance, gratitude, focus, and love.

SIBLING CORNER

Honoring The Death of a Loved One

By [Kimberly Hetherington](#)



“Death is indeed a fearful piece of brutality; there is no sense pretending otherwise. It is brutal not only as a physical event, but far more so psychically: a human being is torn away from us, and what remains is the icy stillness of death. There no longer exists any hope of a relationship, for all the bridges have been smashed at one blow.” ~Carl Jung

I'm at a dinner party with friends when I begin an engaging conversation with a woman I haven't met before.

Music plays softly in the background as our conversation touches on many different topics. She begins to tell me about a difficult situation she recently faced and how her sister supported her through it. I listen intently while she gushes about how lucky she is.

“Life just wouldn't be the same if I didn't have her,” she looks at me and smiles.

I take a sip of my red wine, her words piercing my heart. There's a silence and I wonder if now would be a good time to tell her that I too have a sister. But instead, I gently change the subject.

Often, we never know what emotional wound we've reopened in others. How could we? The cuts and bruises of our own psyche are concealed so well behind earnest smiles and fake laughs. It makes me wonder how often I accidentally hurt others by bringing up the very thing they are trying to move on from.

This particular conversation happens to come in October when my heart prepares for another anniversary of my sister's death. Each year when this date comes around, I feel compelled to commemorate it in some sort of grand, meaningful way. But I struggle to think of anything that could ever be enough.

Unfortunately, the comforting sentiment “time heals all wounds” doesn't really apply when it comes to grief. At least not for me, or my parents. Together, we live in a world that still contains my sister. We re-live memories and laugh about the good times while the rest of the world seems to forget. It's not that we are stuck in a permanent state of agony, we've just learned to adjust.

I suppose the parallel could be like the adjustment to losing a limb. No matter how much time passes you will always remember what it felt like to run and jump and play, and how you can't do that anymore. Some days you might be particularly sad about it, other days it's a bit more manageable.

It seems like a human tendency to crave simplicity and a linear, systematic approach to grief. The infamous Elisabeth Kübler-Ross model has been widely misunderstood in assuming that grief passes in chronological order. But anyone who has experienced it knows that it's a tangled-up mess that slides backward and forwards.

Especially on anniversaries.

Everything about the time of year when the person we loved died can trigger us. It's that familiar smell in the air, the change of seasons, a song on the radio—and in an instant, we are back to the day when we found out. It reawakens the shock we experienced all over again.

The mind always wants a quick fix to move on, but the heart will never forget. So, we tell ourselves that we're fine, everything is fine. Meanwhile, our body surges with depression, guilt, loneliness, anxiety, irritability, anger, as well as physical symptoms from sleeplessness, unusual dreams, headaches, lack of appetite, difficulty concentrating or an increase in distressing memories.

So, what do we do?

It's been six years since my sister died, and I'm still stunned by how powerful a force grief can be. No matter how fine I might think I feel, the pain of loss is still locked inside my body and I can't quite find the keys to let it out. I've yet to find something that brings peace and connection to my sister. In the past I've tried to force the day by hurrying it along, only to find out that this never works. I'm now attempting to lean into the grief to truly understand it so that one day I can work in bereavement and help others.

Here are some ideas that could help.

Do something your loved one liked to do.

My sister loved many things: animals, hiking, traveling, nature, and most of all, art. She was an incredibly talented artist. She would often spend hours drawing, painting, or collaging.

I'm currently studying art therapy and while doing a collaging exercise in class, I felt this strong connection to my sister. After about thirty minutes the teacher told us it breaks for lunch, but I couldn't stop. While the others left, I carried on as if I was in a trance. I felt so connected to my sister that it just about brought tears to my eyes.

Create a physical reminder.

When someone we love dies, it's only in our minds or in our dreams where we can visit them. Having something physical that you can see can be healing.

You could plant a tree in their honor. Watching the tree grow over the years allows for a physical reminder of them. Or you could plant flowers (or buy them if you aren't into gardening) and create your own beautiful bouquet for your eyes to enjoy as a symbolic reminder of the transience of all beings. Flowers, like us, are only here for a short time. Remembering that could help us to accept mortality and enjoy the time we have while we are alive.

Another idea could be to plant a veggie garden. Every moment would be a chance to connect to the loved one and once the garden is in full bloom, ripe with delicious vegetables, a meal can be enjoyed and you can give thanks for them for 'helping' in their own supernatural way.

Write a letter.

Often people say they can't write but everyone can. It's just the same reaction as handing someone a paintbrush and them saying, "Oh, no, I can't paint." Adults tend to hide behind "can't's" or "not good at's" because we were told once that we weren't good at it.

But it's not about being good at anything. It's about healing your heart.

A lot of pain from loss is around all the things we want to talk about and all the things that the person we love is missing out on. A friend of mine once said that she has continued to have conversations with her dad who died. It's helped her immensely to talk with him in her own imaginary way, finding guidance on issues he always helped her with.

So, whether you talk out loud, or want to keep it a letter is completely up to you. Either way, it gives you a chance to release all the things you wanted to say.

If the thought of it makes you feel uncomfortable, bring it up with your counselor and they will develop a plan that works for you.

Set aside alone time.

If you need to, take the day off. If you think, “Ah, I can’t do that…” then let me ask if you would go into work when you had the flu? Hopefully, the answer would be no. Grief is similar to the flu but instead of being a contagious respiratory illness, it’s a pain erupting from the heart and soul. Both need some inner tender loving care. Respect your body, respect your healing, and take some time for yourself.

Accept the sheer power of grief.

Many people mistakenly believe that grief is a single emotion. In actuality, it’s a powerful response that shakes us emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually. It is a natural and normal process that all human beings must face when dealing with loss.

As much as we may think we can outsmart it by ignoring or pushing it down, it will always find other ways to seep through.

Accepting these raw and powerful feelings to flow through your body can be unbelievably painful. I sometimes think of it as an emotional storm. When nature breaks down in a thunderous rage with bolts of lightning, we all flee undercover. In these moments, I respect nature’s honest and vulnerable display of despair and pain. For me, it’s a reminder that we are all like nature, we all experience inner hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes.

No matter how extreme, they always pass. But we need to get out of the way and allow it through.

Moving Forward

No matter what happens to us in life, it moves on. We can be left with the most earth-shattering anguish and still find that the sun will rise for a new day. I know very well how unbelievably painful it can be to see the world carry on as you are left gasping for air.

We all walk our own unique paths on the road to healing. No matter how much time has passed, our loved ones will always remain inside our hearts.

They are the guiding lights that keep us moving forward, and I can’t think of a better way to pay tribute to those we loved and lost than to fill the world with even more compassion and gentle kindness.



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