



MID HUDSON NEW YORK CHAPTER

Bereaved Parents of the USA

Newsletter

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

Kathy Corrigan Chapter Leader

www.mhbpusa.com

JULY/AUGUST 2020



Please join us for our next meetings

Zoom Meeting -- Wednesday, July 8th @ 7:00 (link sent via email)

In lieu of our regular August monthly meeting, please register for

BPUSA National Gathering Virtual Conference August 6-8

See details on page 4 & 5 of this newsletter.

Call Kathy (845) 462-2825 for information



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.

Today I grieve.

My heart is heavy, the loneliness intense, the isolation pervasive, the sorrow deep.

One day.

Five years.

Twenty years...

There is no timeline.

I loved you every day that you were here and I will grieve for you every day that you are gone.

Today I grieve by staying in bed. In the dark. Silence.

Yesterday I grieved looking at pictures, watching old movies, crying with every passing moment.

The day prior I grieved walking in the park, cleaning, cooking, working.

Each day shows me how I must grieve.

Each day informs me what I must do to get through.

I do the best I can to hold the duality of life without you.

To live and to grieve.

To allow for joy, while holding sorrow.

To connect, while feeling alone.

To find purpose, while feeling lost.

To love, while longing.

To be present, while wishing I could go back in time.

Today and every day I do my best to grieve with courage and resilience....even if some days it appears not to be true.

My grief is personal.

Today I grieve.

~ Jennifer Stern, LISW



How to make up for the loss of human touch during the coronavirus pandemic

By Alan Wolfelt *Dr. Alan Wolfelt is an author, educator, grief counselor and director of the [Center for Loss and Life Transition](#) in Colorado.*

My first grandchild was born in early 2020, right as the COVID-19 pandemic was gaining momentum. I got a social-distancing, several-feet-away peek at him early on, but then we were kept apart for three long months out of an abundance of caution that his mom (my daughter), 60-something me, and the healthy-but-vulnerable newborn all stayed safe.

As the shelter-in-place weeks slogged by, I found myself more and more impatient to hold the little guy. I wanted to touch his tiny fingers, nuzzle his rose-petal cheeks, and snuggle up with him for a long, cozy bonding session.

And I wasn't only craving the touch of my grandson. I found myself missing sitting close to friends and loved ones, sharing kisses and shoulder squeezes, hugs and handshakes. Like so many people the world over, I was becoming touch deprived. Even those of us who don't consider ourselves huggy, touchy people are realizing that we need the physical proximity and touch of other human beings to feel well, especially during times of uncertainty and anxiety.

THE POWER OF TOUCH

As a longtime grief counselor and educator, I know that touch helps us feel loved and empathized with. After a significant loss, grieving people who are hugged, touched and visited often report feeling comforted and supported. They also experience that sense of connection that helps them continue to feel meaning and purpose in life.

Since touch is physical, it has bodily effects. When we are touched in comforting ways, our brains are flooded with dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin. These feel-good hormones help regulate our mood and make us feel calmer and happier.

When we aren't touched, on the other hand, our brains suffer from the lack of these chemicals. We may feel depressed, anxious and stressed. We might also have more trouble sleeping.

In addition, touch stimulates the vagus nerve, which branches throughout our entire bodies. Its role is to calm the nervous system, which in turn helps boost our immune systems and can lower our blood pressure and heart rate. If you've been feeling depressed, anxious or stressed; if you've been having sleep issues; or if you've felt unwell physically, lack of physical touch may be the culprit.

Of course, even before COVID, our culture was becoming more and more socially distanced. Instead of face-to-face contact, we have increasingly relied on technology as a main form of interface. Texting, emailing and posting on social media have become the primary ways of "keeping in touch" — even though, ironically, they involve no touching at all.

The social distancing of the pandemic has only heightened our reliance on technology. We're grateful, of course, for the electronic means of maintaining connection. Without them, we'd be truly disconnected and utterly separated. But at the same time, we're realizing their limitations.

Our high-tech, low-touch lifestyles aren't enough. We need and crave physical human contact. We are skin hungry. We are eye-contact empty. We are touch starved.

TIPS FOR FEEDING YOUR TOUCH STARVATION:

Tell your family and friends about your need for touch. If you're sheltering in place with others, talk to them about touch starvation and how you're feeling. Maybe your roommates are craving touch as well. Depending on your relationships, hugs, shoulder rubs, scalp massages, back scratches, foot rubs, and handholding are possible outlets.

If you've been isolated and need a hug, meet up outdoors with loved ones. Then, masks on, share some safe embraces. A 20-second hug is the threshold for alleviating stress and helping you feel calm and safe. Even without hugs, simply gathering outdoors to chat and have distanced face-to-face eye contact for an hour or two can make a big difference.

If you can't be near your loved ones right now, use video calls as the next best thing. Faces and voices help us feel close and "read" one other. On the calls, tell people how much you care about and miss them. You'll find that speaking your love out loud releases the same feel-good chemicals that touch does.

Cuddle with your pets. Touch them in the ways they like being touched.

When it's safe to do so again, consider making an appointment for a massage. Other options: manicure, haircut, or a healing touch or reiki session.

Self-massage also releases feel-good chemicals. Giving yourself an arm rub by rolling a tennis ball up and down your arms a few times a day, or use a foam roller to give yourself a back rub.

Use a weighted blanket when you watch TV or sleep. These 15- to 25-pound blankets press down on the skin, which triggers vagus nerve activity. Choose one that's about ten percent of your body weight.

Practice yoga. Yoga poses place pressure on lots of different parts of your body, essentially touching you all over. I'm happy to share that I finally got to hold my grandbaby recently. He's already a grinning, wriggly three-month-old, and boy did it feel amazing to have in my arms. With my new appreciation for touch starvation, I'm planning on lots of hugs and kisses in the months and years to come.

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Yes, grieving the loss of a child or a sibling is a lifelong journey and the reason for that is because love is also a lifelong journey. Grief won't end because love doesn't end. But grief can and will change -- it can get less sharp, less breathtaking -- even as it bursts back from time to time. Remember -- you can get through this one hour, one day at a time. And love will help to carry you. The love for and from your loved one will be your wind, your anchor, your solace.

~ Ashley Davis Bush, LCSW

BPUSA GATHERING CONFERENCE HAS GONE VIRTUAL!

This is a wonderful opportunity to meet and learn from grief experts from across the country.

Please visit our [website](#) for complete details



Bereaved Parents USA

Virtual Gathering ♥ August 6-8, 2020

ANNOUNCING OUR SPEAKERS!



BOBBY MORTON



ANNE MOSS ROGERS



JAY & KELLY KOVALESKI



SUSAN TOLER CARR

2020 BPUSA VIRTUAL GATHERING WORKSHOPS

“Wings of Hope At Home”

Choose from
40 workshops!

FINDING HOPE THROUGH EXPRESSIVE ARTS

The Warrior Within: Living Inside Your Story With Grace - Beth D'Angelo
Grief Yoga® – Cat Guthrie

Reflecting on Purpose after Loss: Art Therapy for the Artistically Challenged – Vickie Lundy

Finding Peace through the Page – Crystal Webster

The Gift of Music through Grief and Bereavement – Vanessa Pentz

Healing Hearts Meditation – Ann Irr Dagle

The Therapeutic Benefits of Writing Through Grief and Loss - Susan Casey

HOPE FOR OUR GRIEF JOURNEY

The Incredible Impact That Grief Has On Our Lives – Gary Roe

Following the Yellow Brick Road: Our Personal Odyssey Through Grief – Beth D'Angelo, Debbie Byron, Bobby Morton

Journey into the Looking Glass: Finding Hope - Power of Positivity – Dr. Mary Welsh

A Grief Equation – An Engineer Looks at Grief - Paul Balasic

A Mother Still? Life, Years after the Death of an Only Child/All Children – Dr. Susan Bartel

HOPE IN OUR SPIRITUAL CONNECTIONS

Who Am I Now? – Sara Ruble

Co-Existing With Our Children in Grief & Spirit – Sara Ruble, Bobby Morton, Beth D'Angelo

Death Teaches ~ Finding New Meaning – Sara Ruble

Beyond Signs: Living and Growing With and Without Your Loved One – Chris Mulligan

FINDING HOPE IN OUR PURPOSE

Navigating Life after Loss – Kelly & Jay Kovaleski

How Do I Survive? 7 Steps to Living After Child Loss – Pat Sheveland

Finding Yourself Within the Grief – Julie Blackburn

How Do I Live Without You? – Cindy Magee

Finding Peace and Joy After Child Loss: Helpful Tips for Bereaved Parents – Dr. Alycia Marshall

HOPE THROUGH EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

Coping Strategies for Grief & Loss – Anne Moss Rogers

Bright Futures – Sadija Smiley

How Personality May Affect Grieving and Mourning – Sam Timbrook

Exploring Human Experience of Grief; A Spiritual Journey – Bobby Morton, Chris Mulligan, Beth D'Angelo, Debbie Byron

10 Healthy Ways to Feel Better During Grief – Dr. Doug & BJ Jensen

HOPE WITHIN OUR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

He Said, She Said: How People Respond Differently to Loss – Susan & Darrell Carr

Men In Grief – Bobby Morton

Apart From Us, But Always A Part of Us – Lora & Dave Krum

Rock On: Mining for Joy in the Deep River of Sibling Grief - Susan Casey

Your Future: 6 Estate Planning Must Haves – Melissa Leavy

Grief and Hope Inside the Opioid Crisis – Ellen Krohne & Diana Cuddeback, LCSW

HOPE THROUGH OUR FAITH

What To Do with Guilt, Shame, and Regret – Dr. Doug & BJ Jensen

The Many Facets of Forgiveness – Laura Diehl

Struggling to Reclaim My Faith – Dennis Apple

When Tragedy Strikes: Rebuilding Your Life with Hope and Healing – Laura Diehl

HOPE FOR BEREAVED SIBLINGS

Navigating Life After Losing a Sibling – The Kovaleski Family

Phantom Limb: Living with the Loss of a Sibling – Sarah Kravits

Parents and Siblings Idea Exchange – Sarah Kravits and Susan Casey

YOU-nique Footprints: Taking Individuality by Storm – Michayla Kovaleski

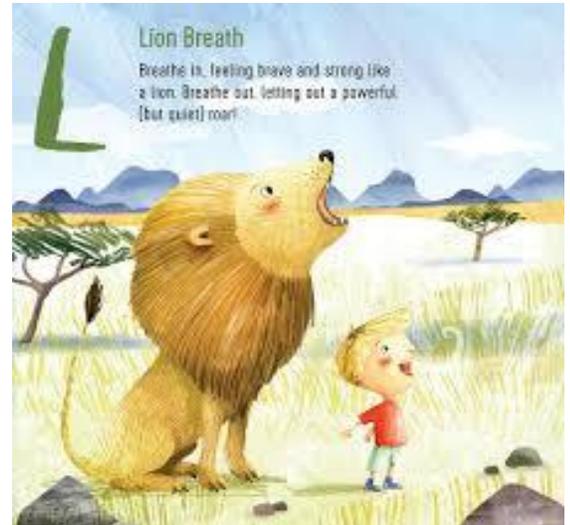
TAKE A BREATHER...

LION'S BREATH

Referred to in yoga as Simha Pranayama, "Lion's Breath" is a breathing exercise to help you feel empowered and focused. Practicing this type of breathing not only stretches the muscles in your face, neck and throat but it also relieves tension and tightness while improving circulation. It's an energetic and awakening breath that will also help to ease the mind. Lion's Breath opens the throat chakra enhancing communication, helping to balancing listening and speaking and boosts self-confidence.

How to do it:

- Sit or stand tall and take a few slow deep breaths, in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Deepen your breath and find an even length and speed inhalation and exhalation. The slower and deeper your breath, the better. Make sure your shoulders are relaxed and your body loose.
- Inhale deeply through your nose and open your mouth and eyes wide as you exhale. Stick out your tongue and stretch the muscles in your face as you exhale making the sound "haaaaah." Your mouth should be as open as possible. Think of a lion breath or roar.
- Practice this for three to four rounds and then bring the tongue back into the mouth and relax your face and throat. Take a few deep breaths and you're done.



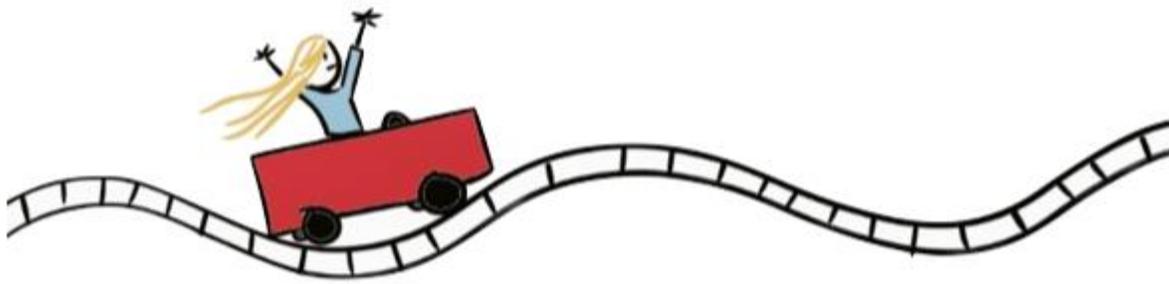
When to do it:

Lion's Breath is a great way to start the day or your warm-up as it creates heat in the body and builds up some energy. You can also use it anytime you need a quick pick-me-up. Try doing Lion's Breath for a few rounds at first. Work your way up to 10 rounds.

Grief is the reminder
that love was present,
and that even if it's no
longer in its original form,
that love still exists.

—MICHELLE MAROS

When we can't feel better
we can feel accompanied
we can feel understood
we can feel connected
we can feel heard
we can feel held
we can feel.



THE GRIEF COASTER: UNDERSTANDING STRESS IN GRIEF

BY ELEANOR HALEY -- WHATSYOURGRIEF.COM

Stress is a given, whether it's experienced in response to major life events or minor everyday occurrences. When life is going okay, your stress ebbs and flows. It's kind of like one of those little kiddie roller coasters – all small peaks and tiny dips.

When something terrible happens, your stress level rises dramatically and you may feel as though you've boarded the '*Mega Mind-Blowing Super Stress Coaster*'.

The stress experienced after the death of a loved one is kind of like the '*Mega Mind-Blowing Super Stress Coaster*', except grief has many uncomfortable peaks and goes on for an unpleasantly long time.

...research has shown that everyday, ongoing, chronic stress can be just as harmful as a major stressful event to your mental and physical well-being. So lucky you, the 'Grief Coaster' includes a major life event *and* ongoing chronic stress. What a thrill!

The Internet has no shortage of articles on stress, but a specific discussion about grief and stress certainly couldn't hurt considering all the potential stressors associated with the death of a loved one. In this article, we'll address the experience of stress in grief and coping with stress.

STRESS IN GRIEF:

It's impossible to parse the stress experienced as a result of a loved one's death out from normal everyday stress. For that reason, when conceptualizing stress in grief, it may be wise to accept that all your stress is now swirling around in one big stress cauldron – making stress soup – yum. That said, here are a few basic reasons why stress levels may increase dramatically after the death of a loved one. In the interest of time (and your attention span), we're unable to write an exhaustive list.

Change: Many people will find that after the death of their loved one they have to adjust to a life that looks nothing like it used to. Like one domino knocking down the next, the death of a loved one can cause secondary loss after secondary loss, which means an immense amount of change.

Emotions: Experiences like trauma, loss, and grief can evoke new and intense emotions that people often feel ill-equipped to deal with. Part of what makes something stressful is an individual's belief that they lack the resources to cope with it. Internal conflict is also a common source of stress. As we noted in a recent article, people often find themselves experiencing conflicting thoughts and emotions in grief.

Interpersonal stressors: A common source of stress and pain after the death of a loved one is conflict, alienation, and hurt feelings among family and friends.

Pressure: It would be wonderful if after the death of a loved one people were given a grace period to grieve. One long enough to allow them to process their emotions, cope with logistical issues, and, I dunno, get their lives together. Sadly, people often experience the opposite when they receive pressure, both from others and from themselves, to... move on, be normal again, feel better, wear pants with non-elastic waistlines, support other grieving family and friends, step into new roles, let go, go back to work, etc.

Frustration: Frustration is a common source of everyday stress. Frustration occurs when the pursuit of something is prevented or thwarted. Basically, frustration occurs when a person wants something they can't have or wants things to be a certain way when they aren't. After the death of a loved one, when the one person you want is gone and everything you knew about life has changed, things can feel very frustrating.

APPRAISING STRESS:

How people experience stress often comes down to how they perceive and appraise the situation. In their 1984 book, 'Stress, Appraisal, and Coping', Lazarus and Folkman explained that humans make two appraisals when responding to stress: a primary appraisal and secondary appraisal.

Primary Appraisal:

In the primary appraisal, a person evaluates whether the potential stressor is relevant to them. If they determine the stressor is relevant, they then decide if it is also threatening.

Secondary Appraisal:

If the stressor is determined to be both relevant and threatening, a person then makes a secondary appraisal by asking themselves – "*Do I have the resources and skills necessary to cope with this stressor?*"

After a loss, the response to this second question is often a resounding *NO!*

When faced with grief, emotion, change, frustration, and all the other peaks on the '*Grief Coaster*', one's first instinct may be to think they don't have the strength or abilities to cope. Still, the ride isn't ending anytime soon, and there's no way to get off, so what choice do they have?

COPING WITH STRESS:

Ideally, in this scenario, a person will choose constructive coping, but we should mention that people are especially susceptible to negative coping when feeling overwhelmed, confused, stressed-out, and/or exhausted.

Not so constructive ways to cope with stress:

- Giving up
- Blaming others
- Defensive coping
- Striking out at others
- Substance use
- Avoidance
- Isolating
- Other negative coping

Stress has been linked to a number of mental and physical health problems, including cancer, diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, migraine, headaches, ulcers, sleep problems, and anxiety and depression, so it's wise for grieving people to actively seek out constructive ways to cope with their experiences. *What's Your Grief* has written many articles geared towards helping people cultivate positive coping. Here are a few suggestions...

Constructive ways to cope with stress:

- Keep a stress journal
- Keep any kind of journal
- Avoid unnecessary stress
- Learn to say 'no' and draw boundaries
- Avoid people who stress you out and who create problems for you
- Eliminate unnecessary responsibilities and tasks
- Express your feelings
- Put problems in perspective
- Practice gratitude
- Don't try to control things that are out of your control
- Process feelings that are keeping you stuck like anger, blame, guilt, regret, shame, etc.
- Count to ten when angry or overwhelmed
- Take deep breaths
- Talk to someone
- Eat well
- Get your anxiety under control
- Exercise
- Seek support
- Reduce substance use
- Do something you enjoy every day
- Get enough sleep
- Meditate
- Do yoga
- Get a hobby
- Make manageable and realistic to-do lists
- Take things one step at a time
- Don't catastrophize
- Laugh
- Congratulate yourself for the progress you've made each and every day
- Spend time with animals
- Disconnect from electronics
- Ask for help and be willing to accept help