



MID HUDSON NEW YORK CHAPTER

Bereaved Parents of the USA

Newsletter

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

Kathy Corrigan Chapter Leader

www.mhbpusa.com

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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.

7 THINGS I'VE LEARNED SINCE THE LOSS OF MY CHILD

By Angela Miller (abedformyheart.com)

Child loss is a loss like no other. One often misunderstood by many. If you love a bereaved parent or know someone who does, remember that even his or her "good" days are harder than you could ever imagine. Compassion and love, not advice, are needed. If you'd like an inside look into why the loss of a child is a grief that lasts a lifetime, here is what I've learned in my seven years of trekking through the unimaginable.



1. Love never dies.

There will never come a day, hour, minute or second I stop loving or thinking about my son. Just as parents of living children unconditionally love their children always and forever, so do bereaved parents. I want to say and hear his name just the same as non-bereaved parents do. I want to speak about my deceased child as normally and naturally as you speak of your living ones.

I love my child just as much as you love your — the only difference is mine lives in heaven and talking about him is unfortunately quite taboo in our culture. I hope to change that. Our culture isn't so great about hearing about children gone too soon, but that doesn't stop me from saying my son's name and sharing his love and light everywhere I go. Just because it might make you uncomfortable doesn't make him matter any less. My son's life was cut irreversibly short, but his love lives on forever. And ever.

2. Bereaved parents share an unspeakable bond.

In my seven years navigating the world as a bereaved parent, I am continually struck by the power of the bond between bereaved parents. Strangers become kindreds in mere seconds — a look, a glance, a knowing of the heart connects us, even if we've never met before. No matter our circumstances, who we are, or how different we are,

there is no greater bond than the connection between parents who understand the agony of enduring the death of a child. It's a pain we suffer for a lifetime, and unfortunately, only those who have walked the path of child loss understand the depth and breadth of both the pain and the love we carry.

3. I will grieve for a lifetime.

Period. The end. There is no "moving on," or "getting over it." There is no bow, no fix, no solution to my heartache. There is no end to the ways I will grieve and for how long I will grieve. There is no glue for my broken heart, no elixir for my pain, no going back in time. For as long as I breathe, I will grieve and ache and love my son with all my heart and soul. There will never come a time where I won't think about who my son would be, what he would look like and how he would be woven perfectly into the tapestry of my family. I wish people could understand that grief lasts forever because love lasts forever; that the loss of a child is not one finite event, it is a continuous loss that unfolds minute by minute over the course of a lifetime. Every missed birthday, holiday, milestone, should-be back-to-school school years and graduations, weddings that will never be, grandchildren that should have been but will never be born — an entire generation of people are irrevocably altered *forever*.

This is why grief lasts forever. The ripple effect lasts forever. The bleeding never stops.

4. It's a club I can never leave but is filled with the most shining souls I've ever known.

This crappy club called child loss is a club I never wanted to join, and one I can never leave yet is filled with some of the best people I've ever known. And yet we all wish we could jump ship, that we could have met another way — *any* other way but *this*. Alas, these shining souls are the most beautiful, compassionate, grounded, loving, movers, shakers and healers I have ever had the honor of knowing. They are life-changers, game-changers, relentless survivors and thrivers. Warrior moms and dads who redefine the word brave.

Everyday loss parents move mountains in honor of their children gone too soon. They start movements, change laws, spearhead crusades of tireless activism. Why? In the hope that even just one parent could be spared from joining *the club*. If you've ever wondered who some of the greatest world changers are, hang out with a few bereaved parents and watch how they live, see what they do in a day, a week, a lifetime. Watch how they alchemize their grief into a force to be reckoned with, watch how they turn tragedy into transformation, loss into legacy.

Love is the most powerful force on earth, and the love between a bereaved parent and his/her child is a lifeforce to behold. Get to know a bereaved parent. You'll be thankful you did.

5. The empty chair/room/space never becomes less empty.

Empty chair, empty room, empty space in every family picture. Empty, vacant, forever gone for this lifetime. Empty spaces that should be full, everywhere we go. There is and will always be a missing space in our lives, our families, a forever-hole-in-our-hearts. Time does not make the space less empty. Neither do platitudes, clichés or well-wishes for us to "move on," or "stop dwelling," from well-intentioned friends or family. Nothing does. No matter how you look at it, empty is still empty. Missing is still missing. Gone is still gone. The problem is nothing can fill it. Minute after minute, hour after hour, day after day, month after month, year after heartbreaking year the empty space remains.

The empty space of our missing child(ren) lasts a lifetime. And so, we rightfully miss them forever. Help us by holding the space of that truth for us.

6. No matter how long it's been, holidays never become easier without my son.

Never, ever. Have you ever wondered why *every* holiday season is like torture for a bereaved parent? Even if it's been five, 10, or 25 years later? It's because they really, truly are. Imagine if you had to live every holiday without one or more of your precious children. Imagine how that might feel for you. It would be easier to lose an arm, a leg or two — *anything* — than to live without your flesh and blood, without the beat of your heart. Almost anything would be easier than living without one or more of your precious children. That is why holidays are *always and forever* hard for bereaved parents. Don't wonder why or even try to understand. Know you don't have to understand in order to be a supportive presence. Consider supporting and loving some bereaved parents this holiday season. It will be the best gift you could ever give them.

7. Because I know deep sorrow, I also know unspeakable joy.

Though I will grieve the death of my son forever and then some, it does not mean my life is lacking happiness and joy. Quite the contrary, in fact, though it took a while to get there. It is not either/or, it's both/and. My life is richer

now. I live from a deeper place. I love deeper still. Because I grieve, I also know a joy like no other. The joy I experience now is far deeper and more intense than the joy I experienced before my loss. Such is the alchemy of grief.

Because I've clawed my way from the depth of unimaginable pain, suffering and sorrow, again and again — when the joy comes, however and whenever it does — it is a joy that reverberates through every pore of my skin and every bone in my body. I feel all of it, deeply: the love, the grief, the joy, the pain. I embrace and thank every morsel of it. My life now is more rich and vibrant and full, not despite my loss, but *because* of it. In grief there are gifts, sometimes many. These gifts don't in any way make it all "worth" it, but I am grateful beyond words for each and every gift that comes my way. I bow my head to each one and say *thank you, thank you, thank you*. Because there is nothing — and I mean absolutely *nothing* — I take for granted. Living life in this way gives me greater joy than I've ever known possible.

I have my son to thank for that. Being his mom is the best gift I've ever been given. Even death can't take that away.

From the pen of...Angela Miller is a writer, speaker and grief advocate who provides support and solace to those who are grieving. She is the author of "[You Are the Mother of All Mothers: A Message of Hope for the Grieving Heart](#)," founder of the award-winning community [A Bed For My Heart](#), writer for The Huffington Post, the Open to Hope Foundation and Still Standing Magazine. Angela writes candidly about child loss and grief without sugar-coating the reality of life after loss. Her writing and her book have been featured in [Forbes](#), Psychology Today, CBS News, MPR, BlogTalk Radio, Open to Hope Radio, Broadly Vice and Writerly, among others. When she's not writing, traveling or healing hearts, you can find Angela making every moment count with her two beautiful, blue-eyed boys. Read more of Angela's writing at [A Bed For My Heart](#).

THE BIOLOGY OF GRIEF

By Ann Finkbeiner (Illustration by Isabel Seliger)

Scientists know that the intense stress of grieving can affect the body in various ways, but much remains a mystery.

In 1987, when my 18-year-old son was killed in a train accident, a chaplain and two detectives came to my house to notify me. I didn't cry then, but a wall came down in my mind and I could do nothing except be polite and make the necessary decisions. When friends and relatives showed up, I was still polite, but the wall had now become an infinite darkness and I was obviously in shock, so they took over, helping me to eat and notify people and write death notices.

I've been thinking a lot lately about the [more than 565,000 people](#) who have died from Covid-19 in the United States. Each of them has left, on average, [nine people grieving](#). That's more than five million people going through the long process of grief.

Manisha Patel, a senior business systems analyst in Bensalem, Pa., lost her father, Ramesh Patel, to Covid-19 in June. "I have been through the toughest time of my life," she said. "I feel heavier, but I weigh no more and I eat less. And there's a lot of gray hair I didn't have. My heart aches for him, it longs for him, it looks for him."

When someone you love dies, experts have a pretty good sense of the path that grief takes through the mind, but have only a general sense of how it progresses through the rest of the body. First is a shock in which you feel numb or intensely sad or angry or guilty or anxious or scatterbrained or not able to sleep or eat or any combination of the above. During those first weeks, people have increased heart rates, higher blood pressure and may be more likely to have heart attacks. Over their lifetimes, according to [studies done mostly on bereaved spouses](#), they may have a higher risk for cardiovascular disease, infections, cancer and chronic diseases like diabetes. Within the first three months, research on bereaved parents and spouses shows that they are nearly two times more likely to die than those not bereaved, and after a year, they are 10 percent more likely to die.

With time, most people stabilize; they begin to learn — gradually and on their own timeline — how to more or less continue with their lives and function in society. But studies suggest that after six to 12 months, about 10 percent of



bereaved people have not begun to function better. They get stuck in what's called ["complicated grief"](#): they stay completely preoccupied with loss and persistent yearning and remain socially withdrawn.

Scientists know that grief is not only psychological; it's also physical. They know that it causes the brain to send a cascade of stress hormones and other signals to the cardiovascular and immune systems that can ultimately change how those systems function. But nobody knows how those systems act together to create the risks of diseases and even death.

One reason scientists don't know more about the biology of grief is that only a handful of researchers study it, and they are usually psychologists with biological interests. Mary-Frances O'Connor, a psychologist who researches grief at the University of Arizona, studies both the psychology of grief and its biological changes in the laboratory and is one of the few researchers who straddles both fields. Hybrid science is seldom funded well; grief is neither a disease nor is it classified as a mental disorder, and the main funding agency, the National Institutes of Health, has no single established channel for funding it.

Nevertheless, researchers have found enough people to take surveys and get blood tests and scans to note some patterns.

Chris Fagundes, a psychologist at Rice University, said that in his own lab, he and his team have found links between grief, depression and changes to the immune and cardiovascular systems. In [one study published in 2019](#), he and his team performed psychological assessments on 99 bereaved people about three months after the deaths of their spouses, and then took blood samples. Those who experienced higher levels of grief and depression also had higher levels of the immune system's markers for inflammation.

"Chronic inflammation can be dangerous," Dr. Fagundes said. "It can contribute to cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, some cancers." In [another study of 65 people](#), published in 2018, Dr. Fagundes and his colleagues found that bereaved spouses who had higher levels of markers for inflammation also had what experts refer to as [lower heart rate variability](#)—a characteristic that can contribute to an elevated risk for cardiovascular disease.

Other studies have found effects on the cardiovascular system, too. In one, published in 2012, researchers measured [the heart rates](#) of 78 bereaved people twice — once for 24 hours within the first two weeks of a spouse or child's death, and again for the same amount of time six months later. They found that their heart rates were initially faster, then returned to normal, suggesting that the bereaved may have been at least temporarily at higher risk for heart disease. Another [study published in 2012](#) found that those with higher scores on grief assessment tests also had increased levels of cardiovascular clotting factors, possibly raising the risk of developing blood clots.

And in [one review of 20 studies](#), published in 2020, people who scored higher on psychological measures of grief also had higher levels of certain stress hormones like cortisol and epinephrine. Over time, chronic stress can increase the risk of cardiovascular conditions as well as diabetes, cancer, autoimmune conditions and depression and anxiety.

Put the studies together and on the whole, Dr. Fagundes said, "everything starts with the brain." It responds to the death (and to intense stress in general), by releasing certain hormones that fan out into the body, affecting the cardiovascular system and the cells of the immune system. Aside from that generality, however, the biology of grief has no clear chain of cause-and-effect that the biology of, say, diabetes, has. That's because the goals of these studies are to better understand the griever's risks for disease, not to understand the path of grief through the body. The one exception is with the study of the brain. In 2001, Dr. O'Connor first began imaging the grieving brain, and a handful of similar studies have been done since. In these studies, a person lies immobile in a functional magnetic resonance imaging (or fMRI) scanner, looks at certain pictures and listens to certain words, and the machine maps the blood flow to parts of the brain. In [one study published in 2003](#), Dr. O'Connor found three areas of the brain that were triggered by words related to grief (like "funeral" or "loss") and a fourth triggered by pictures of the person who died. Some of the brain areas were involved in the experience of pain, others in having autobiographical memories. These findings were "not world-stopping," Dr. O'Connor said, "like, sure, that's what happens in grief."

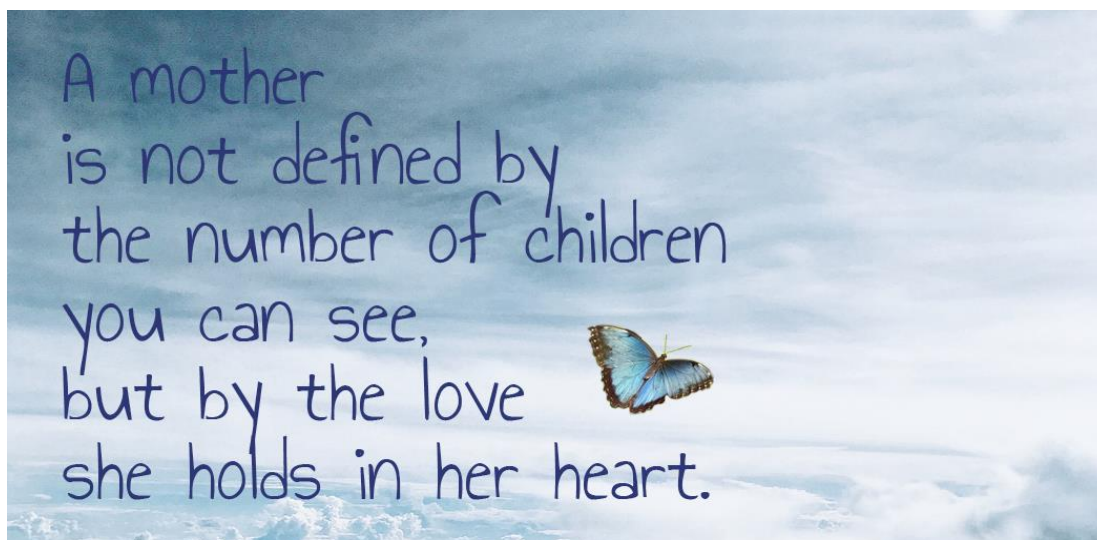
But the responses recorded in another area, called the nucleus accumbens, were more surprising. This region is part of the brain's network for reward, the part that responds to, say, chocolate, and it was active only in people with complicated grief. Nobody knows why this is so, but Dr. O'Connor theorized that in the continuing yearning of complicated grief, being reminded of a loved one with pictures and words might have the same reward as seeing a

living loved one. In regular, uncomplicated grieving, the reminder is no longer connected to a living reward but is understood as a memory of someone no longer here.

All of these studies, however, have limitations. Many of them are small and haven't been replicated. The researchers also don't have the resources to follow the participants over time to see whether those with higher risks for a disease eventually develop that disease. Many studies are also a snapshot of one point in time and will miss the changes that occur in most people over months and years. Studies using fMRI have limits all their own, too: "A lot of things could make the same areas light up," Dr. O'Connor said, "and the same thing might not make the same areas light up in everyone or in one person over time."

Grief, biological and psychological, is of course the result of another hard-to-study state, human attachment or love. "Humans are predisposed to form loving bonds," Dr. O'Connor said, "and as soon as you do, your body is loaded and cocked for what happens when that person is gone. So, all systems that functioned well now must accommodate the person's absence." For most people, the systems adjust: "Our bodies are amazingly resilient," she said.

In [a recent issue](#) of the research digest UpToDate, medical doctors outlined the most current scientific studies on bereavement. One way to think about grieving, they said, is that the feeling of connection to the person who died "gradually moves from preoccupying the mind to residing comfortably in the heart." I'm unsure about that word, "comfortably," but yes, I'm no longer preoccupied. Now, 34 years after my son's death, I'm back in charge, and if pain never quite goes away, then neither does love.



AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM THE BPUSA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

BEREAVED
PARENTS
of the USA



*"Connection is why we're here.
We are hardwired to connect with others,
it's what gives purpose and meaning to our lives,
and without it there is suffering."*

~ Brene Brown

Dear Friends of BPUSA,

We are excited and thrilled to announce that we will be holding an **in-person Gathering** on the weekend of **August 6-8 in St. Louis, MO!**

Of course, we will still be wearing our masks, socially distancing and following all the necessary protocols. The hotel has reassured us that they will be carrying out every precaution to keep us safe.

We have missed our BPUSA family and look forward to gathering once again for a weekend of hope and healing.

The Gathering Registration Packet (everything you need to know about the conference.) and the online registration form will be up on our website very soon. Also on the website will be the link to the hotel for the special BPUSA room rate.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Please join us for a weekend of speakers, workshops and memorial ceremonies that offers hope and healing to bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents. Spend quality time with fellow bereaved who know and understand your journey. Click [HERE](#) to read the 2021 Registration Packet to learn all about our Gathering and then fill out the [Online Registration form](#) to register. Let's meet in St. Louis in August!



NATIONAL GATHERING 2021



Bereaved Parents USA
August 6-8 ♥ St. Louis, Missouri



Announcing Our Keynote Speakers

Jena Kirkpatrick ♥ Bobby Morton ♥ Susan Casey ♥ Cindy Magee

NATIONAL GRIEF ACKNOWLEDGMENT DAY.... AKA MEMORIAL DAY

By Megan Devine – www.refugeingrief.com

It's Memorial Day weekend in the States.

For most people, that means cookouts, barbeques, parades, and a day off from work.

For the widowed community, and for families grieving the loss of a family member, it's just one more day on the calendar we have to *endure*, rather than celebrate.

It's one more gigantic “festive” event that we're called to either ignore or attend while pretending it isn't just torturous to be there this way: without the ones we love.

And of course, the *actual* meaning of the holiday is rooted in grief: it's meant as a weekend, a time, to remember those who have died in service to their country.

We have parades and fireworks to celebrate, or we get into heated political debates as to whether war should be happening or not, but both those ends of the spectrum miss the point:

People have died, and we miss them. People have died, and we need to remember who they were, where they were, why they died.

Whether we agree with the “why,” the facts still remain. Someone died. And they left behind people like us, people like you: people with broken hearts, shattered lives, and empty spaces that cannot ever be filled.

In a sense, Memorial Day weekend should usher this country into *our world*: the everyday reality of grief. Memorial Day should (or could) be a time when the whole nation bows its collective head to its collective heart and says: **ow. Ow. OW. This hurts.**

It could, or it should, be a time when the whole country stops arguing and debating and stands, silently, in awe of the lives that are gone, the lives that have been taken, and stands in respect for the broken hearts still beating, still living here, even after the one they love has died.

Acknowledgement. It could be a day of acknowledgement. Of entering into grief, if just for one short day...

Just one day, where we all bow our heads and say: you were here, you lived, and you're gone. Just one day to feel into the reality of that grief. And just say – thank you. And then – after the acknowledgment – then have a barbeque that celebrates life.



COPING WITH LOSING A CHILD

The difference between fathers and mothers dealing with grief

By www.helpwithgrief.org www.thegoodgrieftrust.org/child/couples-and-grief/

I write this at the risk of promoting stereotypes, but I think it is important to discuss differences in how fathers and mothers tend to grieve. This discussion will certainly not completely apply to any particular couple but I hope there is enough useful information to help fathers and mothers better understand and support each other. I will use the terms “husband” and “wife” while acknowledging that these terms do not necessarily apply to all parental units.



In our culture women tend to form close relationships with other women, and these relationships are typically excellent sources of support during challenging times. Women usually expect to be able to share their joys and their sorrows with their close friends and family members. When a child dies, it is normal for a mother to turn to her support system for comfort.

Sometimes it is hard for a husband to understand why his wife needs to talk about the death so much. It might seem to him that talking with her friends and family about the death only makes his wife more upset. Men sometimes wonder why women seem to dwell on what happened instead of moving on.

On the other hand, women frequently share with me that it seems as if their husbands are not grieving. Women tend to view not talking about the child as abnormal, and maybe even a sign that the father does not care as much as the mother. Men's tendency to "stay busy" following a child's death is also viewed in a negative way by many women.

I have talked with many mothers and fathers following the death of a child, and I have developed a view of how the genders typically cope with the death of a child. Mothers usually have a deep need to remember in obvious ways, and so they talk about the child and everything that happened. They watch videos, make scrapbooks, hang pictures, and they talk a lot. Mothers are more open with their grief, and therefore their pain and functional limitations are usually quite obvious.

In our society, men are expected to fix things and when a child dies, a father is confronted with the reality that this is not something he can fix. Not only is his child gone, but typically his wife is in deep and obvious pain and he is helpless to fix that. Conditioned to "do something", it is completely understandable to me that many men retreat from their wife's grief into their work, where they can actually accomplish something most days.

Something else that I have observed over the past few years is the profound loneliness of a bereaved father. Men are not usually allowed the privilege of close friendships the way women are in our society, and so often men rely on their wives for their primary source of emotional support. When a couple loses a child, the wife turns to her friends/family while the husband is faced with the loss of his child AND his primary support system— his wife. This is nobody's fault but it is very often a reality.

Mothers and fathers may express their grief in different ways, but I am convinced that expression (or lack thereof) is not an indicator of depth of grief. Men and women both suffer profoundly and deeply when they lose a child, even if their grieving looks different.

Differences in grief do not have to drive couples apart. The first thing that can help is to remember that it is perfectly normal for people to express grief in different ways. Second, it is also normal to cope with grief in different ways, and we certainly see this in every couple that loses a child. Judging another person's grief is not helpful or loving, and so mothers and fathers need to aim for acceptance with each other. Third, it is very important not to use grief as a measure of love. A parent whose grief is more private did not love that child any less simply because s/he is not as open with feelings.

In addition to being gentle and accepting of our partner's grief experience, couples can support each other by actively working on their relationship. A child's legacy should not be the destruction of his/her parents' relationship and so it is a tribute to the child you both love to work on the relationship. Think back to a time when your relationship was happy – what did you do together? What did you talk about? Make a list and then start doing those things from a happier time.

The death of a child is a big strain on a relationship but it does not mean a marriage or relationship is doomed to failure! Understanding and respecting differences in the expression of grief is important and so is making time for the relationship. Take that other parent – the one your sweet child loved so much – and do something kind and loving in honor of your child.

Sometimes relationships need help, and that is certainly available. Marriage counselors can help couples find a smoother path again. If a counselor seems like a good idea, be prepared to shop around for one that seems compatible with you and your spouse. Also, look for one that has experience both with couples and also with grief.

There are wide variations of normal grief in both men and women. Differences in the expression of grief and coping should not be seen as a problem, but simply as differences. Children's memories are honored when we continue to love, respect and support the other parent through the difficult – but shared – loss of that child.