



MID HUDSON NEW YORK CHAPTER

Newsletter

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

Kathy Corrigan Chapter Leader

www.mhbpusa.com

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2016



Please join us for our next meetings

Thursday, January 7, 2016 -- Topic: "Good Self-Care Helps you Grieve"

Thursday, February 4, 2016 -- Topic: "How My Heart Feels Tonight"

7:00 at The Children's Home of Poughkeepsie, 10 Children's Way, Poughkeepsie, NY

Call Kathy (845) 462-2825 for more 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.

We, the bereaved, enter the New Year one moment at a time; one hour at a time; one day at a time...KC

JUST FOR TODAY...

Author Unknown

Just for today I will live through this day only, and not set far-reaching goals to try to overcome all my problems at once. I know I can do something for 12 hours that would appall me if I felt that I had to keep it up for a lifetime.

Just for today I will be happy. Abraham Lincoln said, "Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be." He was right. I will not dwell on thoughts that depress me. I will chase them out of my mind and replace them with happy thoughts.

Just for today I will adjust myself to what is. I will face reality. I will correct those things that I can correct and accept those things I cannot correct.

Just for today I will improve my mind. I will not be a mental loafer. I will force myself to read something that requires effort, thought and concentration.

Just for today I will do something positive to improve my health. If I'm overweight, I'll eat nothing I know to be fattening. And I will force myself to exercise - even if it's only walking around the block or using the stairs instead of the elevator.

Just for today I'll do something I've been putting off doing for a long time. I'll finally write that letter, make that phone call, clean that closet or straighten out those dresser drawers.

Just for today before I speak I will ask myself, "Is it true? Is it kind?" And if the answer to either of those questions is negative, I won't say it.

Just for today I will make a conscious effort to be agreeable. I will look as good as I can, dress becomingly, talk softly, act courteously and not interrupt when someone else is talking. Just for today I'll not improve anybody except myself.

Just for today I will have a schedule. I may not follow it exactly, but I will have it, thereby saving myself from two pests: hurry and indecision.

Just for today I will have a quiet half hour to relax alone. During this time I will reflect on my behavior and get a better perspective on my life.

Just for today I will be unafraid. I will gather the courage to do what is right and take the responsibility for my own actions.

Just for today I will expect nothing from the world, but I will realize that as I give to the world, the world will give to me.



HOW THE GIFTS ARRIVE...

Buying Valentine's Day flowers for my eight-year-old son is always terribly difficult. There never seems to be an arrangement suited for a young boy that also expresses profound parental love.



My heart is naturally drawn toward the pink, red and yellow flowers but they certainly don't speak the same way to my son. He'd be more satisfied with an arrangement involving a monster truck. I look at each flower arrangement that touches my heart and I think of my son; would he like this, does it shout out his name? Most of them don't shout out his name so I pick something bright, sunny and cheerful...

Picking a balloon will be far less draining than the flowers. No other object better represents a child's spirit than a helium balloon. Helium balloons - happy and fearlessly dancing excitedly above our heads - lost in an imaginary world. They bounce and sway and play innocently above our world while yearning to be set free - to fly as high, as high can be. Helium balloons come in all shapes and sizes and they are so much like our children. Selecting a balloon is easy - they all work.

Buying his Valentine card tends to be a repeat of the flower episode with an added emotional twist. The loving poetry strikes emotional surges in my heart and throat. I desperately struggle to suppress my sentiment but my eyes threaten to announce my secret. The urge to become disconnected is overwhelming; like a marathon runner whose body conspires for a rest, I feel the overpowering need to settle for the next card. But the card must be true. I have to find the right card. I have to stay together long enough to find the right card.

The truly difficult quests are now behind and I just have to decide whether to get a gift or not. I've given him one every year since he was born so it just wouldn't feel right to stop now. He'd love something electronic but I don't want to buy anything too elaborate. I truly can't endure another difficult decision so I settle for a teddy bear like I did the previous year.

Standing in the checkout line with the other parents always threatens to destroy my delicate façade. If I actually allow myself to connect with them, to think about their love, to envision them giving these gifts to their children; I will definitely explode in an uncontrollable emotional meltdown. To sidestep this catastrophe, my mind has to lock into a mantra - pay the bill and get to the car; pay the bill and get to the car. . .

I get the balloon safely into the car and prop the flowers so they won't tip. I don't need to sign the card until I'm with my son. That's the way we always do it. The shopping trauma transforms the drive into a complete blur. I go into a trance and rely on my mental auto-pilot to safely deliver me to my destination. I arrive physically intact and am relieved to be alone because I desperately need solitude to salvage my senses.

The first thing I do is tidy the place up a bit. Then, I arrange the gifts. I place the flowers on the ground and make sure they won't easily tip. With the balloon fastened to the teddy bear's wrist, I nestle him near the flowers leaning him comfortably back. There's a bench near my son where I sign the card. An eternity of extreme emotions passes as my face goes from lapped hands to the sky and back to my son. I search for the words from so much to say... there's so much to say.

Emotionally drained into a calm, I prop the card upright on the slab and touch a kissed finger to his picture, which is forever sealed on his stone.

When you see the gifts adorning the stone fields, please know, "this is how they arrive".

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*Sometimes in life,
our spirits are nearly gone...*

*Sometimes we feel so crushed and broken
and overwhelmed that we do not even see
where we are going.*

*We are just out there walking to keep the
heart beating and the circulation moving.*

*But if that is all we can do and we are
doing it that is still being faithful...
not quitting... giving it our best.*

~ Ann Kiemel



BOOK REVIEW

“Society often concerns itself with keeping up appearances, maintaining the status quo, and covering up problems, as if pretense will somehow make things right!

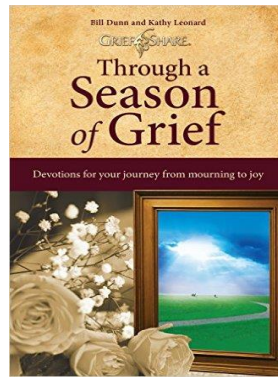
‘We want everything to be glossed over,’ Rev. John Coulombe observes. ‘We want everything to be gilded with gold. We think it should be tidy and nice.’

But life is not ‘tidy and nice’ and pretending it is will hinder your healing process and make it even longer.” (An excerpt from *Through a Season of Grief* by Bill Dunn and Kathy Leonard)

If you've lost a spouse, child, family member, or friend, you've discovered that few people understand the deep hurt you feel.

Where do you turn for daily comfort and help? Where do you find the tools to move forward? *Through a Season of Grief* is the first 365-day devotional designed to support and uplift you in the first, most difficult year of bereavement.

These devotions offer biblical comfort and practical teaching that will enable you to take steps forward each day toward healing. You will better understand the grieving process and will receive needed encouragement along the way.



PICKING UP THE PIECES

Franchesca Cox

I used to think picking up the pieces meant having a faith that never asked “Why?” I used to think picking up the pieces meant getting over it (that didn't last long — there is no “getting over it”).



I used to think that picking up the pieces meant that they would never fall again.

But Instead of beating myself up that none of the above have resonated with me at all, or for very long, I have decided to redefine what picking up the pieces means.

After your world gets smashed to smithereens there are certainly pieces everywhere for a very, very long time and you find yourself in this endless quest to make sense of the mess and left to pick up the pieces that used to be whole.

Picking up the pieces is crying so much your face hurts.

Picking up the pieces is not kicking yourself for not crying “enough”.

Picking up the pieces is visiting the cemetery as often or as infrequent as you need to.

Picking up the pieces is realizing you cannot measure your love for your child by what you do or don't do.

Picking up the pieces is believing you did everything you could.

Picking up the pieces is blasting Van Morrison or the Beach Boys when you just don't want to cry.

Picking up the pieces is never forgetting the big and little things that made the world a friendlier place after grief stole so much.

Picking up the pieces is taking time for yourself. Picking up the pieces is challenging yourself to find something to be thankful for.

Picking up the pieces is embracing grief however that might look at any given moment. The good, the bad and the ugly.

Picking up the pieces is understanding that this is only the beginning.

Picking up the pieces is understanding that you have a story with the power to make someone else feel less alone.

Picking up the pieces is ditching your mask. Picking up the pieces is considering someone else's broken world. Someone always has it worse. Always.

Picking up the pieces is taking risks.

Picking up the pieces is dancing with reckless abandon.

Picking up the pieces is taking a canvas and throwing paint at it 'til your hands hurt.

Picking up the pieces is breaking dishes, slamming the door or screaming as loud as you can.

Picking up the pieces is being okay with disappointing some people.

Picking up the pieces is taking responsibility for my own healing and happiness.

Picking up the pieces is accepting that the old me gone and never coming back.

Picking up the pieces is daring to live and breathe and smile without feeling guilty.

Picking up the pieces is embracing this wild and unpredictable emotion that has turned my world inside out, upside down and so many other ways as a lifelong companion.

Picking up the pieces is accepting grief as the product of love — because we cannot grieve over something we did not love.

First, remember that you will always have the pain of missing him and your future with him. That pain will find its place as you build on the legacy -- whatever made him unique and wonderful in your life -- that your child gave you.

Second, remember that when your son was born, you had the pain of birthing that was eventually replaced by the beautiful little baby you cuddled, nurtured and watched grow. You had 19 years of good and bad memories of Paul, and they will not be lost. They are all yours. No one can take them from you.

It is much harder, but not impossible, to let go of the pain associated with his death. Letting go of the pain does not mean you'll stop missing him. At times your tears will flow, as they should, but ask yourself this:

"If Paul had one wish for me now, what would he want? Would he want me to hold onto my pain as a way of holding onto him?" Only you can answer that, but I doubt the answer would be yes.

Grief is complicated, often subconscious but nonetheless real. It may cause us to hold onto our pain because of guilt. What parent doesn't feel guilt after the death of a child? Our role as a parent is to protect our child; when he or she dies, we often feel we have failed as parents, and therefore we deserve the pain and no better. Our child is dead. How dare we go on to have a happy, fulfilled life?

I find it hard to believe that your Paul would want you to suffer for the rest of your life because he can no longer be with you. I can't believe any of our children want to be remembered in that way. In fact, I think if there is an afterlife and it's as wonderful as we've heard, their only wish is for us not to suffer now. I know our children want us to work through the pain and be happy again.

In my case I had a memorable bubble bath where I thought of just slipping under the water to lose my pain. In that same bubble bath I confronted the pain of my daughter's death only to find myself closer to her. I felt horrible outside the bath and terrible when I entered it. As I sat there, I decided to challenge the pain -- face it head on. I decided to feel it, to let it envelope me -- not to deny it -- and after a few minutes I began to feel my Kristen close to me.

This was the first time after her death that I felt this way -- the first time that I realized it was the pain that kept me from the wonderful warm memories of our life together. Our relationship was anything but pain. I learned that the more I challenged my pain, the closer I felt to her. Kristen was just on the other side.

This Winter of your life will pass, as all seasons do. Stay in your season of Winterness as long as need be, for everything you feel is appropriate. There is no right way to grieve. There is just your way. It will take as long as it takes.

Rusty Berkus

TRAPPED IN PAIN

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...I received this question from a mother whose 19-year-old son, "Paul" (not his name), was killed instantly when his truck rolled over:

"I can't live with the pain of losing Paul, but I feel so caught. His death is the last memory I have. If I lose the pain, will I lose a part of him also?"

This is such an important question because so many who are grieving the loss of a child feel the closeness and the constancy of pain. But here are some other things to consider.

2016 NATIONAL GATHERING
July 1-3, 2016
Wyndham Indianapolis West
Indianapolis, IN

We are looking forward to bringing you great speakers and workshops all part of a weekend full of hope and healing.

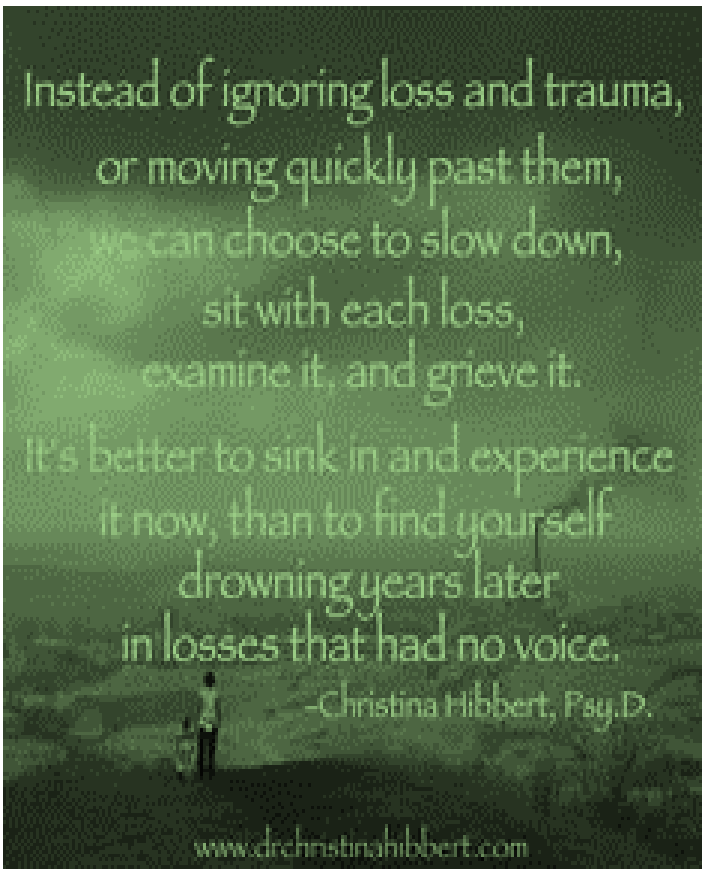
We have so much to do here in Indiana. Plan your vacation around the Gathering and discover what we have to offer. From the rolling hills, covered bridges, Amish settlements, city life, to historical locations, amusement parks, Amazing state parks and more!

Indianapolis is the Racing Capital of the World with the Indy 500, Brickyard 400, NHRA US Nationals and several more. Plan a tour of the Indianapolis 500 racetrack and museum and/or attend an Indianapolis Indians baseball game.

www.bereavedparentsusa.org



SIBLING CORNER





Winter Approaches

At my door and in the yard
the flowers and insects die.

The cricket's gone, his kingdom come,
the rose is history.

There's this certain, ceaseless longing
for loved ones out of reach.

--Michael McClintock

And I felt like my heart had been so thoroughly and irreparably broken that there could be no real joy again, that at best there might eventually be a little contentment. Everyone wanted me to get help and rejoin life, pick up the pieces and move on, and I tried to, I wanted to, but I just had to lie in the mud with my arms wrapped around myself, eyes closed, grieving, until I didn't have to anymore.

~ Anne Lamott

With many losses, the pain never entirely departs, rather it becomes a part of the bereaved, tucked away in a corner somewhere in the deep recesses of the heart. There it remains at a constant low level ache. As one begins the healing process, the pain lessens to a level that he/she can function. Hopefully in time, the loss and the grief are integrated and become barely perceptible. Life begins anew, but it is a life forever changed. The bereaved person has been transformed by the loss—like a caterpillar spinning a cocoon to hibernate during dark times before emerging as a butterfly in the spring. The grieving process usually ends when people realize that they will survive and focus their energy on living.

*He'd begun to wake up in the morning
with something besides dread in his heart.
Not exactly happiness,
not eagerness for a new day,
but a kind of urge to be eager,
a longing to be happy.*

Jon Hassler

*We must live through the dreary winter
If we would value the spring;
And the woods must be cold and silent
Before the robins sing.
The flowers must be buried in darkness
Before they can bud and bloom,
And the sweetest, warmest sunshine
Comes after the storm and gloom.*

Anonymous

We as bereaved parents, help grieving parents and families rebuild their lives following the death of a child.



SIBLING CORNER

A NOTE TO PARENTS OF TEENS WHEN A BROTHER OR SISTER DIES

By Ellen S. Zinner, Psy.D., University of Baltimore

What has happened to your family is tragic. Your grief may be overwhelming at times, and many people around you may let you know how difficult they believe your loss to be. Unfortunately, this affirmation of suffering is almost non-existent for the brothers and sisters of those who have died. Adolescent survivors, particularly, may be “forgotten grievers” because they frequently go unrecognized by others in their suffering and they themselves often hide their feelings from their peers and from you. Teens are too old to take on your lap and rock; yet still too young to deal with the myriad of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that come with the loss of a brother or sister.

I hope you read and share the accompanying article following this one with your teen. If sharing is difficult, perhaps leaving it in his or her room to read in private may be helpful. I want to add just a few more points about your role in helping your teenager best manage his or her bereavement.

The major psychological task of adolescence is forging a unique self-identity. The death of your child may make this process far more complicated for your surviving teenager. On the one hand, the tragedy itself may make your child more anxious and in need of staying close to parents. There may be demands for more attention. On the other hand, because emotions may be so raw at home and teens may be overwhelmed by their own emotional vulnerability, your teenager may choose to spend more time with peers, desperate to create a “life as usual.”

You can help by being patient and supportive. There is research that shows that some teens are more resilient than others in dealing with loss and that a positive self-image makes a difference in their ability to cope successfully with loss. The same research also shows that, regardless of the strength of self-image, the typical reactions of grief as described in the following article are found in the majority of teens for the first 18 months to 2 years following the death of a sibling.

You may see physical and behavioral problems with your teenager for several years following this loss. Bereaved adolescents have reported more physical symptoms than non-bereaved adolescents for up to 4 years following the death of a sibling. Depression

scores for bereaved adolescents have been shown to be higher than that of non-bereaved adolescents for up to 3 years after the death of a loved one. Younger siblings, those between the ages of 13 - 16, were found to be more negatively affected by the death of their brother or sister than were older adolescents.

Processing one’s feelings of grief is helpful. This includes you and your teen. It is important to make time to share. If your family has a history of open sharing, this is the time to make sure that this valuable attribute continues. It is helpful if you model appropriate ways of expressing grief. Make sure that special occasions, such as birthdays and holidays, include some tangible ritual in which your family can participate together in memory of your deceased child.

Don’t be hurt if your adolescent turns to others to share his or her feelings. You may still be too vulnerable to serve as a patient counselor. That’s okay. What is important is that your teenager has someone to talk to now. Remember that you are still a parent. Your grieving may take almost every waking moment of your day, but somehow you must continue to parent your surviving children. This is not an easy task. But all your children need and deserve your attention. It is important to make plans to spend special time with your teens, to continue holiday celebrations, and to make sure that special events such as proms and graduations are not lost to your grief.

No one in your family will be the same now that your child has died. Helping your surviving adolescent to go on living, to become wiser and more mature than before, may be your biggest challenge

TO A TEENAGER WHOSE BROTHER OR SISTER HAS DIED

By Ellen S. Zinner, Psy.D., University of Baltimore

You may feel alone and “different” now that your brother or sister has died. While it is estimated that about 90% of high school seniors have experienced the death of a family member or friend, the loss of a sibling is still rare. Whether your relationship was close and supportive or more competitive and argumentative, the bond between siblings is a strong one, based on growing up together. Even who you are - the “oldest” or “youngest,” the “big brother” or “little sister” - depends on your siblings. Therefore your brother or sister’s death may be the worst thing you have ever had to face.

This loss in your life can be a two-edged sword. You may experience uncomfortable thoughts and emotions for several years after your sibling’s death. But this crisis may lead to significant personal growth and maturity. I want to share with you what you might

experience and how best to take care of yourself during this time of grieving.

EMOTIONAL RESPONSES: In one research project the majority of teens said that they felt confused, shocked, angry, lonely, numb, and guilty at the time of the death. All of these feelings were less intense, but still present for many teens, two years after the death. These feelings are common and normal for survivors of any age, and, for almost all grievers, they decrease in frequency and strength over time. But that time period varies from person to person, and you may feel some or all of these or other emotions (such as sadness, fearfulness, even relief) for several years. This is particularly true on special days or during special activities that remind you of your sibling.

COMMON THOUGHTS: You may think about your brother or sister a great deal. In the study mentioned above, 95% of the adolescent survivors said that when their sib had died they thought about him or her all the time. Even two years later, 91% of the teens said that they thought about their brother or sister frequently.

SURVIVOR GUILT: Another thought that occurs for many teens is that it is unfair that they are alive and their brother or sister is not. This is called "survivor guilt." Survivor guilt is frequently present soon after a death occurs - we feel guilty about lots of things done and not done - but survivor guilt may pop up again particularly when you reach the age that your brother or sister was when he or she died (if you were a younger sib) or when you achieved something that he or she was not able to do, like graduating from high school or college or getting married. The question of "why him and not me" is a hard one to answer.

You may find yourself worrying that something bad might happen again. We like to think that we and our families are magically protected; but now you know better. The fear that a second tragedy could happen to your family is very common for all survivors. It does take courage to grieve a significant loss and to learn to live fully again.

SUICIDE: Thinking about suicide is also relatively common for teen survivors. About one-third of the teens in the study had thoughts about killing themselves either to join their brother or sister or to stop the pain of grieving. A typical statement from these teens was: "I don't know how to handle all my feelings right now. I feel so bad, and my mom and dad feel terrible. I thought about suicide just to get away from all this sadness. But that would only hurt the family more, and I don't want to do that. It's a dumb thought! John (his brother) would never have done that." Suicidal thoughts are not unusual at times of stress, but you don't have to act upon them.

PHYSICAL PROBLEMS: With so much going on in your head, how you feel physically is going to be affected too. You may experience headaches, stomach problems, and pain in your joints. Others complain of sleeping difficulties and severe nightmares. Some have problems with writing or playing sports.

BEHAVIOR CHANGES: The majority of teen survivors also report problems in school. Grades go down. Your ability to concentrate may be seriously impaired for months following your loss. You may also experience a change in how you interact with your friends. Talking about your loss may seem awkward, not talking about it may seem dumb. But finding the right friend to listen is hard, because most friends haven't lost a brother or a sister.

COPING: Despite all the difficulties, learning to cope with a death this close to you can bring positive consequences. In a large study of college students who had been teenagers when their brother or sister died, almost all survivors identified some benefits that they had derived from their experience. These included having a deeper appreciation for life; showing greater caring for loved ones, experiencing stronger emotional ties with others, and feeling greater emotional strength. This perception of increased maturity from having faced a personal tragedy sometimes made these students feel different from their peers. But they also reported that having one close personal friend with whom they could talk to made the difference in their growing from their experience.

HELPING YOURSELF: You may have heard the old saying that "time heals." It is true, but healing often takes more work on your part and longer than you expect. What can you do to help yourself? **First**, give yourself a break. The death of a brother or sister is a huge loss which will draw on your emotional and physical energies for quite a while. Be gentle with yourself during this period. **Second**, find yourself a listener. Talking out your thoughts and feelings to a friend or family member helps you make sense out of the confusion you are experiencing. If you are feeling overwhelmed or out of control, find a professional listener - a counselor or teacher - who can provide an experienced sounding board for you. It may also help to write down or record your thoughts. **Third**, look for benefits. A terrible loss has occurred; don't let it be a complete waste. What can you learn about life and death, about your family, and about yourself from this tragedy. Search for and be open to a gift of personal growth your brother or sister has left you. The pain and confusion of having had a brother or sister die will always be a part of your life history. It is now up to you to write the future chapters. Make them good!