



MID HUDSON NEW YORK CHAPTER

Bereaved Parents of the USA

Newsletter

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

Kathy Corrigan Chapter Leader

www.mhbpusa.com

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2022

Please join us for our next monthly meeting

Thursday, December 1st - Create a Holiday Craft led by Charlotte Jackson
3 Neptune Road, Poughkeepsie, NY at 7:00 pm

(Guardian Self-Storage Building, Park & enter at the front of the building – East Lobby Entrance)
For more information, please email Kathy kjcorrigan5@gmail.com or call her at (845) 462-2825

LET IT SNOW!

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.

4 THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN LIFE FEELS HOPELESS

By *Sylvia Huang* www.OhSunnyMornings.com

“However long the night, the dawn will break.”
~African Proverb

Were there times in your life where it felt anything that could go wrong went wrong? That was me five years ago.

In a span of nine months, my marriage to a partner of eight years broke down, I lost four family members to unexpected deaths, and I suddenly found myself hurtled from living the dream life to being jobless, penniless, and homeless.



To say life knocked the wind out of me would be an understatement.

Each time I picked myself up, another blow would send me sprawling toward a sense of utter defeat. It was as if a tornado swept through my entire being and left me empty and devoid of hope, strength, and any ounce of self-belief.

Shell-shocked, I spent that whole year crying. I would wake up crying in the mornings, run to cry in public toilets during the day, and end my days crying myself to sleep. It was a dark period of my life where everything was one blurry haze of tears.

As those days of hopelessness stretched on, the only thing I could focus on was taking baby steps every day to build a new life and a new future.

It was an arduous journey where I was often taking one step forward and two steps backward. Many times, I felt like I would never see the light at the end of the tunnel, and I struggled to find the strength to inch forward.

Five years on, I finally came out the other side. My new life and the new me are still under construction, but I now have in me a spring of strength to propel me forward, regardless of setbacks or how grim a situation seems. This newfound capacity did not develop overnight. It grew gradually as I practiced and incorporated into my life the valuable insights below.

If you're going through difficult times now, the following four reminders may help you be more resilient.

1. Remember that life always changes. Things can get better.

When troubles strike, it can feel like things will only get worse, but that is the pessimist in us talking. If we keep the faith and respond to the situation with positive and constructive actions, we can break out of the cycle and things can get better.

Sometimes all we need to do is to simply let time pass and to resist the temptation to overreact and aggravate the problem. During times like these, I would distract myself by actively engaging in other areas of my life.

2. Recall how you overcame similar struggles in the past.

When plodding through a challenging time, it's natural to be gripped by fear, self-doubt, and pessimistic thoughts that we won't be able to surmount the obstacles. We forget that it always feels impossible until it's done, and that we have overcome similar struggles in the past.

A simple but extremely effective thing I did was to list down the occasions in my life where I busted through hurdles and rose above the seemingly insurmountable difficulties. As I penned out the victories, I found renewed faith in myself and in the unknown future, which may well bring the good instead of the bad like I feared.

3. Remember that things aren't as bad as they seem.

Zoom out on the issue and focus on the grand scheme of things. More often than not, the raging fires in our lives hijack our attention and we fail to see the big picture. It's rarely the case that every aspect of our lives went awry at the same time, and it's critical to keep the right perspective when the going gets tough.

We need to remember that our problems are merely a subset of everything that's going on in our lives and not let the worries, fear, and anxiety overtake our minds. Even if every area of our lives—namely health, relationship, work, money, and passion—went haywire, the fact that we're alive means there's hope for things to turn around.

4. Remember that there are still things to appreciate.

Do not let the darkness blind you from seeing the stars. It's human nature to get caught up with the things that are not working out in our lives and forget the good bits. I'm a big believer of a grateful heart being a magnet for abundance and miracles.

No matter how terrible life may seem at any single point, there are always good things if we keep our eyes peeled for them.

Thanks to the challenges, I came to see who my true friends were, and I also learned to appreciate many of the blessings I had taken for granted. I might have lost a life partner, loved ones, money, and employment, but these setbacks are transient.

I would always have my degree, knowledge, skills, professional experience and network, and people who care deeply for me to fall back on and to get me back on my feet.

As I grew stronger in handling life's curveballs, I was grateful that I had developed this invaluable life skill at a young age so I can have the rest of my life to benefit from it. While maintaining a thankful heart, I realized that even in dark times there are stars we can gaze upon if we view our plight through the right lens.

Which areas of your life are you struggling with right now? How do you cope and stay resilient?

We don't transform emotional pain. Rather, we are transformed "by" it. It's not a mechanical process; it's an alchemical one we receive.

Believing that we transform emotional pain is a patriarchal, fix-it paradigm. Once pain has landed in us, trying to fix it usually makes it worse.

We fix physical wounds and broken bones. This is a linear, archetypal masculine process. Emotional work is the opposite: we have to fully accept and embody what we are feeling before it can clear. In the process, it transfigures us.

This is a circular, paradoxical, archetypal feminine wisdom largely lost on our modern age. Allowing our pain, past and present, to change us is how we integrate it. It's "magic" precisely because we aren't fully in control of it, and we don't "do" it.

This way we become more than what we can think or imagine—because it's not our mind that does most of the work. We surrender to what feels like a power greater than ourselves, in our bodies. This contrasts with deliberately seeking magic via beliefs in other, disembodied, fantastic realms.

The little bit that we "do" is to gently enter and discover our heartbreaks—the abandoned old and just rupturing new—so we can surrender to feel and move through them, which requires some skill and wisdom. This is how we spark transformation, while the fire and rising from the ashes happen unbidden in the dark, hidden chambers of our bodies.

This wisdom is the heart of psychological transmutation: clearing what impedes us in order to rebirth a more beautiful present—for ourselves, others, and the planet. It is the generation and evolution of embodied love.

~Jack Adam Weber



THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION: TAKING CARE OF YOUR HEALTH DURING GRIEF By CORALEASE RUFF

The mind and body are intricately connected, which results in a physical response to our emotions, thoughts, and actions. Poor emotional health weakens the body's immune system, making us more susceptible to minor illnesses, infections, such as colds and flu, and long-term illnesses. Consequently, the manner in which we take care of our health while grieving not only helps relieve some of the common side effects of grief, but also helps lessen complications of existing diseases and developing future health problems.

How Grief Induces the Body's Stress Response

Grief is not an illness that requires medication, but a normal natural healing response to a loss of any kind. The resulting stress causes the body to display strange and unfamiliar symptoms. All parts of the human body, i.e., the brain and nervous system; the endocrine and immune system; body organs such as the heart, lungs, and kidneys, and emotional responses like fear, love, anger, and grief, share a common chemical language. When we experience a stressor (grief), the alarm/threat message goes to the brain, which secretes stress hormones (adrenaline) that alert all body organs to secrete more hormones to prepare the person for fight or flight.

Because grief is long term, these chemical reactions continue to occur, resulting in some of the following common signs and symptoms of grief:

- Digestive problems such as loss of appetite or overeating
- Sleepiness and sleeplessness
- Heartache and chest pain
- Forgetfulness and memory loss
- Cognitive changes including general confusion and difficulty concentrating
- Emotional changes including sadness, crying, and prolonged weeping
- Respiratory problems including shortness of breath and asthma
- Panic attacks, i.e., sweating, rapid heartbeat, numbness, and tingling
- Confusion with an associated feeling of loss of control or a feeling of “losing one’s mind”

Some bereaved parents have been diagnosed with illnesses not previously experienced such as diabetes, hypertension, or cancer. Another bereaved mother thought she was having a heart attack and learned after her third trip to the emergency room that it was a grief response. After an explanation for her symptoms, she was able to calm herself down.

Nutrition and Fluid Intake

Proper nutrition is markedly difficult when you have no appetite for food. Establishing regular mealtimes is desirable, as well as eating frequent smaller meals. A diet of the superfoods, i.e., leafy green vegetables, citrus fruits, berries, beans, fish high in omega 3s, nuts and seeds, whole grain, low-fat milk, and yogurt is most nourishing. Small amounts of comfort foods and one’s favorite dish can encourage eating. Mindful and slow eating aid in digestion and prevent food being caught in the throat. Healthy snacks of nuts, veggies, and fruits should be kept on hand to avoid snacking on sugary and salty snacks. Avoid highly seasoned, high fat, and fried foods. Avoid simple carbohydrates such as donuts and pastries because they can lead to a drop in blood sugar causing a jittery feeling. When nutritional intake is compromised during grief, it is useful to add a multivitamin, as well as the anti-stress vitamin-B complex. One should avoid the use of artificial sweeteners, but rather substitute natural sweeteners such as honey or foods that are naturally sweet, such as apples and bananas. Mealtime can be more fun when eating in a different location with a friend.

Water and fluid intake often suffer during grief. It is helpful to drink a cool glass of juice, water or other liquid at least every two hours to avoid dehydration. Caffeinated drinks, like coffee and colas, should be limited or avoided because they may increase jitteriness and sleeplessness.

It may be tempting to numb the pain of grief with food and drink, especially alcohol. This can, in turn, lead to additional problems like dependence and overweight. Numbing the pain also prolongs the grieving process.

Sleep Enhancement

Insomnia, the inability to fall asleep and/or to stay asleep, is a distressing grief manifestation that can be difficult to overcome. The natural tendency to seek sleep medications is not always effective and may have negative side effects, including habit formation. Behavioral adaptations that can help resolve sleep problems should be considered.

Environmental preparation of the sleep area includes removing the TV, laptop, smartphone, and other work-related items. The temperature of the room should be comfortably cool for sleeping. Some grieving individuals feel chilly, so socks will help warm the feet and add a warm cup of herbal tea or a warm bath for additional comfort. The addition of soft lighting and an essential oil, such as lavender, will help induce relaxation.

A sleep routine should consistently include a get-up time, a standard bedtime no later than 10 pm, and a wind-down (chill-out) period. Winding down includes physical and mental winding down. The first part of winding down is to separate your busy day from bedtime. Clear your mind of thoughts, worries, pent-up feelings, and the proverbial “To-Do List” by writing them in a log/journal. Don your favorite sleepwear, play relaxing music or light a candle for added ambiance. The second part of winding down is to physically relax the muscles by alternating between tensing and relaxing each part of the body from head to toe. Slow deep breathing calms the heart and further enhances relaxation for sleep.

Some of us get to sleep but find it impossible to stay asleep. The addition of white noise (sounds introduced via a recording or other instrument specifically to keep silence or other environmental noises from becoming disruptive)

may be especially helpful. If you awaken and do not get back to sleep in 10-15 minutes, don't try to force it. Just rest in bed and enjoy the feel of your soft pillow and bed covers around you. Give yourself the gift of time-out, awake or asleep. Some of the tried-and-true anecdotes for insomnia include warm milk, herbal teas, and counting sheep from 100 backwards. Another technique is the use of specialized sleep DVDs, which use headphones to enhance the sound.

A word of caution: avoid alcohol and caffeine, especially after about 5 p.m. The stimulation can interfere with sleep. Finally, avoid strenuous exercise too close to bedtime, as this also interferes with sleep. When all else fails and sleep does not come, consider seeking medical advice for sleep aids for short-term use only.

Some of you may have the opposite problem—you find it nearly impossible to get out of bed. You do not have any energy and you feel there is no reason to get up. Nothing seems to matter anymore. This is also a normal grief reaction. Give yourself permission to do nothing, at least for the first few days. Then plan for a favorite activity, such as a movie, shopping, a massage, or visiting with a good friend. In the early months and years, it can be difficult to find anything of interest.

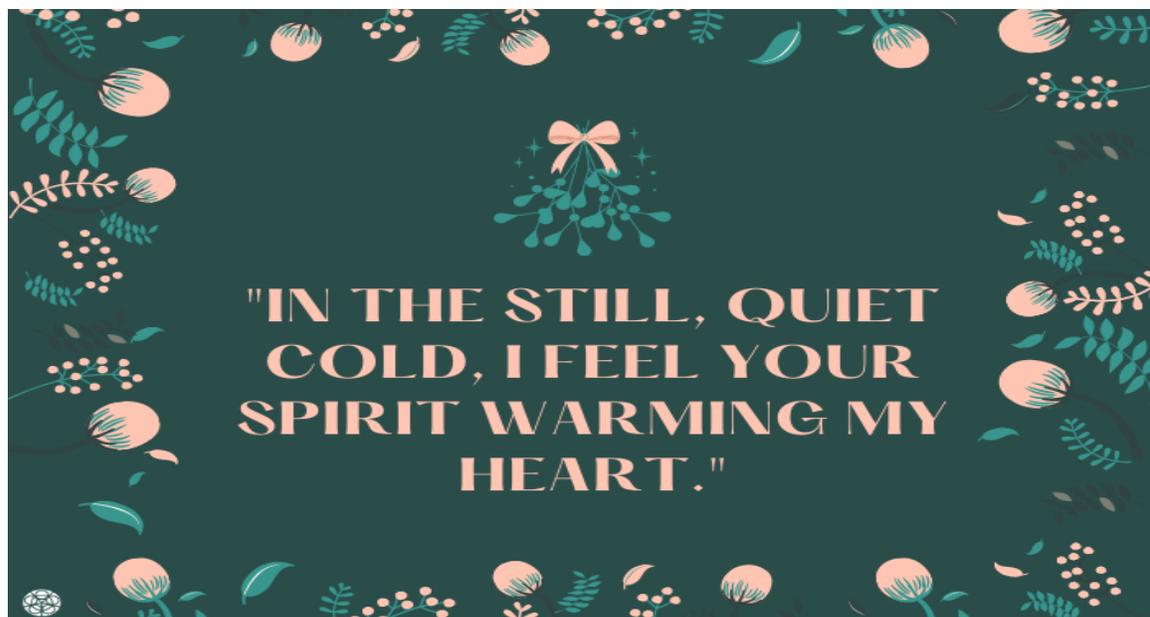
Rest and Relaxation

Rest is extremely important because grief is hard work and the body needs rest to repair itself. In the days and weeks following the loss of a loved one, there is often a flurry of activity. There is also a desire to move faster than the brain and body are able to. Later on, there is the desire to keep busy so as not to think of your child. These factors contribute to fatigue, which is so common in early grief. One way to get some rest and relaxation is to schedule a specific relaxation time in your day. Be sure to include time alone. Plan an enjoyable activity exclusively for pleasure and relaxing such as listening to happy music, reading or writing poetry, dancing, yoga, or any of your favorites. Time spent observing birds, trees, flowers, and nature in general, is relaxing, as is gentle exercise.

Exercise

Getting physical, along with keeping the heart healthy, helps strengthen muscles and bones, reduces stress, and lowers overall health risks. It also helps to expend some of the angry feelings and pent-up emotions. It is especially helpful during acute grief because it increases energy and helps the body produce endorphins that elevate the mood. Additionally, exercise helps facilitate rest and sleep which can be elusive in early grief. If you have a fitness program in place, you are already familiar with its benefits. If not, do yourself a favor; find a physical activity of interest, and begin today. Exercise a minimum of 30 minutes five days a week. Keep in mind that some exercise is better than no exercise. A simple brisk walk is an exercise that requires no equipment, is cost effective and easy to achieve. Other exercises may include any of your favorites, such as bicycling, jogging, dancing, aerobics, swimming, and weight training. Be sure to get a physical exam before embarking on a new exercise program.

In summary, this long difficult journey called grief is manifested in symptoms that result from the connection between the mind and body. Careful attention to health issues during bereavement can help relieve some of the normal grief manifestations and, more importantly, prevent a worsening of existing disease conditions and prevent future health problems.



HOLIDAYS: “CAN’T WE JUST SKIP THE HOLIDAYS?”

From *SHATTERED Surviving the Loss of a Child* by Gary Roe

“Christmas? Thanksgiving was an emotional nightmare. Can’t we just skip it this year? Where’s the Grinch when you need him?” Glenn asked. “I’m planning on hiding. I know it won’t work, but I don’t know what else to do,” Connie added.

Glenn and Connie’s daughter Skylar grew up into a beautiful and rugged young lady. Her two brothers proudly took credit for the rugged part. Together they loved hunting, fishing, and the outdoors. One summer vacation, the family camped at a gorgeous spot next to a river. Early one morning, during a tubing excursion down the river, Skylar’s younger brother fell in and went under. Without hesitation, she went after him. As she tugged him to safety, Skylar was knocked unconscious. She slipped away quickly, as her brothers watched in horror. She was 15. “She’s our hero. How do we do Christmas, or any holiday for that matter, without her?” Glenn asked.

HOLIDAYS CAN BE TOUGH

Thanksgiving. Christmas. New Year’s. Valentines. Memorial Day. July 4. Labor Day. These are the times when families gather to enjoy one another and celebrate. For those of us enduring loss, these days are often devoured by the absence of our loved one.

Holidays are tough. They surface our losses in ways nothing else can, especially Thanksgiving and Christmas. Far from a celebration, these times seem more like some cruel joke. Surrounded by festive atmosphere, sparkling lights, and holiday décor, we sigh and weep. Holiday cheer is replaced by holiday sadness. We bump into a memory with every step.

What do we do with this? Some of us opt for hiding. We emotionally, and sometimes physically, lock ourselves in, hunker down, and wait for the present storm to pass. The sheer dread of the assault of memories can be paralyzing.

Yet, the holiday comes. Is it possible to meet it and somehow use it to honor our child and express our grief in a healthy way? YES, but it’s going to take some intentional, proactive thinking and decision-making.

Let’s consider for a moment. What about this holiday reminds us of our child? What fond memories does this time of year evoke? Is there something our child especially enjoyed? What are some of our favorite memories of them during this time? Is there a way to use this holiday to remember and honor them?

Here are some examples from other parents:

- Put a stocking up for them. Have everyone bring a card that reminds them of that child and put it in the stocking. Pass around the cards on Christmas Eve or morning and read them aloud.
- Wrap an empty box and put it under the tree, with the child’s name on it. When presents are opened, pass it around and have each person share a memory.
- As a family, light a candle in remembrance, and share some memories.
- Have each family member write a brief letter or poem to your child. Read them aloud together at some point during the holiday.
- Enlarge a picture of your child. Provide markers and have family members or friends write messages on the picture. Display it during the holidays.
- Prepare a favorite dish of your child and include it in the holiday meal.
- During the holiday meal, take some time and focus on your child. Have those present share a memory.
- Do something completely new, like take a trip somewhere you’ve never been, and honor your child in some way during your time together as a family.

These are just a few examples. The key is being creative and proactive. We need a plan – even a simple one. In fact, simple is probably best.

Many are concerned that activities like these will be too emotional and infuse the holidays with sadness. The truth is things are already emotional. When families get together, everyone is hyper-aware of who’s missing. Having a plan to honor our child gives our families an opportunity to share and grieve together in a healthy way. Yes, it will be emotional, but that doesn’t mean it can’t be good.

The holiday will come. Be proactive. Be creative. Make a plan. Keep it simple. We don’t have to let the holidays crush us. Rather, with a little proactive decision-making we can use this time to express our grief in a healthy manner, honor our child, and love those around us.

WORLDWIDE CANDLE LIGHTING



The Worldwide Candle Lighting held on the 2nd Sunday in December unites family and friends around the globe in lighting candles to honor the memories of the sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, and grandchildren who left too soon. As candles are lit at 7:00 pm local time, hundreds of thousands of people commemorate and honor the memory of all children gone too soon.

Now believed to be the largest mass candle lighting on the globe, the annual Worldwide Candle Lighting (WCL), creates a virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone. This started in the United States in 1997 as a small internet observance and has since swelled in numbers as word has spread throughout the world of the remembrance.

Hundreds of formal candle lighting events are held, and thousands of informal candle lightings are conducted in homes, as families gather in quiet remembrance of children who have died and will never be forgotten.

For hundreds of years, lighting a candle has been a way to show respect for those that have died. This beautiful gesture shows that although someone may be gone from this world, their memory will endure, and the light of their flame will continue to inspire and guide others.

Worldwide Candle Lighting Day is a celebration of solidarity and memory. It's a day on which people around the world gather to light candles for children who have died and to show that they will always be loved and never forgotten. The candles are lit at the same time in every time zone, meaning that a consistent warm glow passes around the planet for a full 24-hour day.

We hope you will join us in lighting a candle in memory of your precious child on December 11 at 7:00 PM. You can gather with us as Mid Hudson Bereaved Parents at the Christ the King Church or you can light a candle at home and still be a part of this amazing wave of light for the Worldwide Candle Lighting.



MID HUDSON BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

ANNUAL CANDLE LIGHTING CEREMONY

Sunday December 11, 2022

Christ the King Episcopal Church Hall

2 Eugene L. Brown Drive

New Paltz, NY 12561

6:30 Registration

7:00 Ceremony

Slide Presentation of Our Children

Music, Readings & Poetry

Reception immediately following the ceremony

♥ Please bring a finger food to share after the ceremony ♥

If you have not already done so, please submit your child's picture to be included in the Slide Presentation as soon as possible.

Email Kathy -- kjcorrigan5@gmail.com

SAVE THE DATE!!

NATIONAL GATHERING 2023



Bereaved Parents of the USA



July 21-23 ♥ Hilton Washington Dulles Hotel ♥ Herndon, VA

www.bereavedparentsusa.org