

Good self-care is first step in coping with grief

By Terri Steinbrink

“Grief is not a sign of weakness, nor a lack of faith. It is the price of love.”

Those words on a sign at RiverStone Health Hospice Home reflect the reality of grief. Grief is not a problem to be solved or fixed. Grief is an experience that requires support rather than solutions. Seeing grief that way changes everything.

Grief often comes in what feels like waves. Holidays, anniversaries and even something as simple as seeing your loved one's favorite brand of peanut butter in the store can bring up waves of grief. As with ocean waves, when you stop struggling, the waves will carry you to shore. It's important to remember that you will not go back to the same place where you began. Grief and the new realities that come with it will change you.

Over time, your experience of grief will be different. Different doesn't mean forgetting; it means rediscovering who you are and reengaging in the world.

Traditionally, we think of grief following the death of a loved one, but it can also occur with other losses and life changes such as chronic illness, loss of a job, divorce, terminal diagnosis or loss of independence.

Friends and family may not know what to say. It is hard to see people that we care about hurting, so well-intentioned friends and family may encourage you to “get over it” or “move on”. They may not understand why you aren't back to “normal”. Or they may offer platitudes such as “he's in a better place” or “you should count your blessings”. These societal messages aren't meant to be hurtful, but they can leave grieving individuals feeling isolated and alone.

Grief is trauma that will affect every aspect of your being. Your brain may not be working quite the same – a common response called “grief brain”. You may find yourself putting your cell phone in the freezer or other things that seem crazy. You are not crazy. I encourage people to be careful, even to drive slower because the brain and reflexes aren't as quick, especially in the early stages of grief.

The pain of loss can feel overwhelming, but there are healthy ways to cope with your grief and begin the healing process.

- Be kind and patient with yourself. Don't have the same expectations of yourself that you usually have.
- Take good care of yourself. That isn't being self-indulgent, rather it means you are creating space to heal.
- Try walking or other soothing activities. Any movement with a sense of rhythm can have a calming effect on emotions, body and brain.
- Make room for both tears and laughter. Don't feel guilty for the joy you experience. It doesn't diminish how much you miss your loved one.
- Check out the extensive variety of books on grief and bereavement at Billings Public Library.

- Seek out people who are safe to share with, grief groups or counseling support. RiverStone Health Hospice offers two weekly grief support groups at no charge to community members. Walk-ins are welcome at these groups:

Tuesday Grief Support Group, 1-2 p.m., St. Bernard Catholic Church, 226 Wicks Lane.

Friday Grief Support Group, 1-2 p.m., St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 119 N. 33rd St. Parking is available in the lot east of the church building.

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