As a grief counselor, I regularly hear from people about how exhausted they are while grieving. Most are very surprised at the degree of fatigue they feel.

There are several aspects of the grief process that contribute to the fatigue, including the physical demands of care-giving prior to the death as well as the busy-ness related to the death of a loved one; probate, funeral planning, and the constant reminders of the loss in daily life.

One aspect of grief that contributes to fatigue is the many faces of grief. Several years ago at our grief camp, the campers made a grief mask. On the inside of the mask, they placed images that reflected the real inside feelings they experienced related to their grief. On the outside, they placed images that reflected the feelings they show the world. The difference in the two ‘faces’ was striking. The inner feelings were very strong and challenging: fear, sadness, pain, loss, isolation, relief, anger, guilt, confusion, loneliness, disbelief, and helplessness among others. The outer face often depicted calm, acceptance, happiness, completion, peace and an overall sense of being okay. As we processed these two faces of grief it became evident that, while going through one of the most difficult times in life, we must also become award winning actors in many of our relationships.

Why? Why do we need to play-act around people when we are grieving our loved one’s death? There are lots of reasons, and just like the faces our campers made, some reasons are internally based while others are external in nature.

Internally, we may have absorbed messages that prompt us to wear a mask; thoughts like “Big girls don’t cry” or “Others don’t need or want to hear your sad story” or even “It’s been long enough now, you should be over it”. These internal messages and many others are myths of grief. They have served the purpose of making those who are grieving chose the ‘socially acceptable’ masks to wear. Myths and old messages usually serve those in society who are uncomfortable with the powerful feelings of grief. These myths and messages are part of the reason that grieving persons are often educating others about the grief process.

Externally, there are cultural, societal, and familial norms that prompt us to wear masks. We who are grieving do not want to be perceived as weak, scarred or vulnerable. We don’t want to be made fun of or be singled out as being different or fragile. ‘We don’t like the ‘elephant in the room’
Lessons from those who have lost
By Larry Dawalt, M.Div.

How does one deal with the death of an adult child; or any child? For two precious people I have worked with over the past year, the loss of a child is a reality that they deal with every moment of every day. One lost an adult child and the other an adolescent. They aren’t related. They don’t even know each other. But in their own way they have each confirmed some lessons about what they are experiencing and what they need in the way of help and hope.

The first lesson is go slowly and learn to hurt in increments. There is no way to fully comprehend the loss in its totality all at once, so there’s no way to grieve it all at once. Take little bites and don’t be afraid to not ‘go there’ when you aren’t ready. It’s not denial. It’s just waiting; regaining strength and adding small things into your life before confronting the missing pieces.

The second lesson is to lower expectations of family support and/or support from friends. It may be good and it may not be good. People may be genuine and kind or they may sensationalize and want to hear the story over and over. It doesn’t take long to find out who is supporting you and who is insensitive, whether they intend to be or not. You will find people you had no idea could be so supportive and they make up for those who disappoint for whatever reason.

The third lesson is to let the child keep living even though they are not physically present. What would they do, what would they say, what would they think, or how would they feel are natural questions you would ask anyway; so why not keep asking them, since they are still alive in your heart? They may be gone physically, but they are still present with you in many other ways and always will be.

Lastly, find someone who will listen without judgment and let you just talk and talk and talk. Talk about what you are feeling, talk about your anger, talk till you cry- then rest a minute and talk some more. Talk about your loss, talk about your health, talk about lunch, talk about current events - talk about anything. Learning to talk about anything and everything may eventually lead you to what you really need to say. It’s like Julia Cameron’s ‘Morning Pages’ as a way to break out of writer’s block, which she described in her book *The Artist’s Way*. She said to take a sheet of paper and just start to move your hand. The first sentences may be something like, ‘I don’t know what to write. I don’t even want to write right now. I don’t even know why I am trying to write. But here I am writing. Did I just write five sentences?’ Talking is the same way. You may not know what you really need to be saying about your loss, where you are now, the future, or anything. But if you can just start talking with someone whose sole purpose is to listen, you may eventually say what you need to say or get something out that will help you move forward.

I want to conclude by simply thanking these two precious people for the lessons they have taught me - and now you. They didn’t want to become teachers, but their courage and wisdom is a gift. They are truly an inspiration and it is an honor to walk beside them.

Larry Dawalt is Senior Director of Spiritual & Grief Care Services for Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region. He can be contacted at dawaltl@hpccr.org.

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**Adult Child Loss Support Group**

Planning is underway to form a grief support group for those surviving the loss of an adult child. If you are interested in joining this support group, please call 704.375.0100.
game due to other’s discomfort.

So what do we do? We wear masks to protect ourselves, to shield ourselves from others, and sometimes to deny our true feelings. Far be it from me to suggest that we should never wear a mask under any circumstance.

However, if we truly hope to reconcile our grief we need to find some trusting, compassionate individuals who allow us to remove our masks and be real. Sharing our stories of grief and loss and having the opportunity to express our feelings are important steps in reconciling our grief. Those individuals may be friends, family or even professionals who are available to you. It may even be a member of a grief support staff such as ours at Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region. But find someone. Share. Express yourself. And learn what it’s like to take off the mask every now and then and be real.

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### In Good Company

#### Event Calendar

(All are welcome!)

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<th>Monday</th>
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<td><strong>Homestead Grill</strong>&lt;br&gt;1st Tuesday of each month&lt;br&gt;357 North Generals Blvd.&lt;br&gt;Lincolnton, NC&lt;br&gt;5:30 pm&lt;br&gt;Contact: Kathy Douglas&lt;br&gt;704.887.6437</td>
<td><strong>Rippington’s</strong>&lt;br&gt;2nd Tuesday of each month&lt;br&gt;109 W. South Street&lt;br&gt;Waxhaw, NC 28173&lt;br&gt;11 am&lt;br&gt;Contact: Travis Smith&lt;br&gt;980.297.9430</td>
<td><strong>Panera Bread</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Whitehall Commons Shopping Center)&lt;br&gt;1st Thursday of each month&lt;br&gt;8152 South Tryon Street&lt;br&gt;Charlotte, NC 28273&lt;br&gt;10:00 am&lt;br&gt;Contact: Marge Brokaw&lt;br&gt;704.335.4308</td>
<td><strong>Bob Evans Restaurant</strong>&lt;br&gt;2nd Thursday of each month&lt;br&gt;16707 Northcross Drive&lt;br&gt;Huntersville, NC 28078&lt;br&gt;6 pm&lt;br&gt;Contact: Amy Thomas&lt;br&gt;704.602.0930</td>
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<td><strong>Panera Bread</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Arboretum Shopping Center)&lt;br&gt;3rd Tuesday of each month&lt;br&gt;Pineville Matthews Road&lt;br&gt;Charlotte, NC 28277&lt;br&gt;10 am&lt;br&gt;Contact: Marge Brokaw&lt;br&gt;704.335.4308</td>
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<td><strong>Julia’s Coffee</strong>&lt;br&gt;4th Tuesday of each month&lt;br&gt;1133 North Wendover Road&lt;br&gt;Charlotte, NC 28211&lt;br&gt;10 am&lt;br&gt;Contact: Travis Smith&lt;br&gt;980.297.9430</td>
<td><strong>Bob Evans Restaurant</strong>&lt;br&gt;4th Thursday of each month&lt;br&gt;16707 Northcross Drive&lt;br&gt;Huntersville, NC 28078&lt;br&gt;11:30 am&lt;br&gt;Contact: Amy Thomas&lt;br&gt;704.602.0930</td>
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Registration has begun for upcoming “Grief: The Reluctant Journey” support groups. The meetings start in early spring 2014 at our various HPCCR locations. A pre-group interview with one of our grief counselors is required before registration. To find out more, and to schedule an interview, please email Cummings@hpccr.org, or call 704.335.4334. For our Lincolnton support groups, email Journigan-Douglas@hpccr.org, or call 704.887.6437.

Hospice & Palliative Care Lincoln County

A six week closed-end support group “Grief: The Reluctant Journey”, will meet each Wednesday beginning April 16 - May 21, 2014 from 10am -11:30am at the new HPCCR Lincolnton office located at 900 Dontia Drive, Lincolnton 28092.

A pre-group interview is required and can be arranged by contacting Kathy Journigan-Douglas at 704.887.6437 or journigan-douglas@hpccr.org