The Summertime Challenge of Grief: Lonely, Alone and Solitude

By Janice Olive MHDL, LPC

Summer is time for fun and vacation, time away from jobs and ordinary tasks of life. The beach calls or the mountains come to mind, a cool retreat from work. Yet this year may be different for many who are grieving the death of a loved one. Family vacation is often meet-up time for getting together with Mom and Dad or taking time off and spending it with your spouse and the kids. But what happens when the summer vacation time arrives and you find yourself alone for the first time? If not completely alone, you may still have the lonely feeling of loss.

One of the most common grief reactions is feeling lonely. Someone with whom you have shared your happy, sad, and just-the-ordinary moments dies and you may feel lonely, no matter how many others are around you. Lonesome, as you watch neighbors pack the car for vacation or when you receive the “wish you were here” cards from the places you used to enjoy. It is a feeling we don’t often talk about but just can’t shake after a death.

Marta Felber, a psychologist who is well acquainted with her own experience of grief, often writes about loneliness. She advocates recognizing it and expressing it, on paper or aloud, physically and with tears. When feelings become blocked, she does something to reach them, like reading cards or letters her loved ones sent and thinking about the ways she misses them. You can find and hold something special that belonged to your loved one. Feelings are not to be avoided.

Can alone times be enriched? Can it become solitude? Creating an alone place in your home may become a part of self care that will be rewarding for you. Keep it simple, uncluttered, and comfortable. Take a regular break to go there for prayer or meditation, reading poems or whatever inspires you. You might try creating a mantra that resonates with you like “grant me peace”, “I shall survive”, or “we shall overcome.” Say it several times to yourself. You might also try talking to your loved one or writing a letter to them. Or you may try writing a conversation in which you talk to your spouse and then write his or her answers.

There may be a season, day of the week, or time of day that is most lonely for you. Prepare for it by listing things you can do: ask a friend to go to church with you, call someone just to talk, visit a local park, check for local baseball games you can attend. Just getting outdoors can help to fill in those spaces in our lives when we are alone. Try doing something on your own and make it special by dressing up, fixing a nice meal, sitting at the table instead of eating in front of the TV. If a friend or family member can’t attend an event with you, try it on your own.

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The 13th annual Chameleon’s Journey grief camp, presented by Kids Path®, is slated for October 13-14 at Camp Thunderbird in Lake Wylie, SC. The overnight camp for children and teens 7 - 16 is free of charge and is open not only to the families of patients who were under our care, but also to the general community — families with children who have experienced the loss of a loved one. Losses are typically a parent, sibling, grandparent or other close relative.

Led by counselors and volunteers trained by Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region and Kids Path professional staff, the camp provides a safe and comfortable environment where campers learn that they are not alone; that grief is a normal, often difficult process, but a manageable one. Our staff members have an understanding of the grief process and are very experienced in supporting children coping with loss. In addition to typical camp activities, campers participate in music, art, dance, and a memorial service. Each activity plays an important role in helping campers learn appropriate ways to cope with loss. And yes, campers do laugh and have fun throughout the weekend. After all, that’s what camp is for!

For more details about camp or to request an application, call 704.335.4334 or go to hpccr.org and click on “Grief and Loss Services”, then “Chameleon’s Journey”. Please apply early, as space is limited. The deadline for applications is September 21.

Hospice & Palliative Care Lincoln County

Walk & Talk

Grief, similar to depression, can become one of the most debilitating feelings you will ever experience. Often you feel like you have absolutely no energy and no motivation to do anything. Sleeplessness and loss of appetite can also occur during grief. One of the best things you can do for yourself is exercise. Strap on your shoes and join us on Mondays at 10 am beginning July 2nd for Walk & Talk!

Where: Our office located at 107 North Cedar Street, Lincolnton

For more information or questions, please contact Kathy Douglas, Grief Counselor at 704.887.6437 or douglask@hpccr.org
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A woman whose spouse died found it easier to drive to her hometown for a summer vacation because she knew she would be met there by old friends and family. Driving alone was a challenge but simply putting her husband’s hat on the seat of the car next to her gave her enough feeling of connection to make it tolerable. She planned a route that would give her breaks to get out, walk, stretch and enjoy the scenery along the way. She was determined not to miss out on her summer vacation. You too may find that the anticipation is more difficult than the actual event. You too may want the old familiar feeling of joy.

Trust the process of grief, take time to be with all your feelings. Notice the difference between alone and lonely. Find your ways of creating a pleasant solitude during the days ahead.

In Good Company

“Hearts Healing & Hoping Together”
(All are welcome!)

Coffee & Conversation
2nd Tuesday of each month at 10am
Starbucks (Trader Joe’s Shopping Center)
6432 Rea Road, Charlotte, 28277

Coffee & Conversation
4th Tuesday of each month at 10am
Julia’s Coffee
1133 North Wendover Road, Charlotte 28211
Contact Marge Brokaw, Grief Counselor, at 704.335.4308

Dinner Grief Support Group
2nd Thursday of each month at 6pm
Bob Evans Restaurant
16707 Northcross Drive, Huntersville 28078

Lunch Grief Support Group
4th Thursday of each month at 11:30am
Bob Evans Restaurant
16707 Northcross Drive, Huntersville 28078
Contact Amy Thomas, Grief Counselor, at 704.602.0930

Walk & Talk
Every Monday at 10am
107 North Cedar Street, Lincolnton, 28092
Contact Kathy Douglas, Grief Counselor, at 704.887.6437
Groups are forming now for “Grief: The Reluctant Journey” support groups, beginning Fall 2012, at our various HPCCR locations. A pre-group interview with one of our grief counselors is required prior to registration for the grief support groups. To find out more about them, and to schedule an interview, please email cummingsg@hpccr.org, or call 704.335.4334. For our Lincolnton support groups, email douglask@hpccr.org, or call 704.887.6437.

**Grief Support On-Line**

Increasingly, the Internet has become a part of our daily lives. Communicating with ease, searching for information, paying bills, and buying and selling goods and services can now be done anytime, anywhere. It was inevitable that online grief support and grief education would become another avenue offered to the bereaved, and those supporting the bereaved. Although some people prefer face-to-face or personal grief support, others may turn to grief websites for help. The websites can take a variety of forms such as chat rooms, forums, memorials to loved one, or they might offer grief resources - books, articles and tips. What these dedicated grief websites all have in common, though, is a community of people who are grieving and giving support to each other, and a place of belonging. Many of the popular grief websites are hosted by non-profits. Below is a sampling of websites to explore.

- **Compassionate Friends**: www.compassionatefriends.org
- **GriefNet**: www.griefnet.org
- **National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization**: www.caringinfo.org
- **Hospice Foundation of America**: www.hospicefoundation.org
- **Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region**: www.hpccr.org

**For Children and Teens**

- **The Healing Place**: www.thehealingplaceinfo.org
- **The Dougy Center- National Center for Grieving Children and Families**: www.dougy.org

**Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region**

1420 East Seventh Street
Charlotte, North Carolina 28204
704.375.0100
hpccr.org