

# Healing with Haven

July/August 2008

## How Support Groups can Help

Adapted from, "Understanding Your Grief," Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D, Compassion Press, 2004

When you enter the world of bereavement, you do not need to grieve alone—nor should you try. Know that it is ok to lean on your friends and family for support during this difficult time despite what you may have heard. Our culture often forces us to adopt ways


of avoiding and withdrawing from the painful, but necessary work of grieving. It is important to surround yourself with as many supportive resources as possible. There are many great books on grieving, as well magazines and newsletters that offer a variety of different perspectives about the grieving and mourning process. Many people have found that support groups have provided a safe place where they can reconcile their losses and find new meaning in life. In an effective support group, members may achieve the balance between giving and receiving, between independence and an appropriate, self-sustaining dependence. If the group is facilitated by a skilled leader, you will find more comfort and understanding than expected. Most of all, support groups provide a safe atmosphere where hurting people can lean on one another and stand still while the world spins around them.

### Examples in which support groups help grievers:

- o Meeting new people who had similar experiences, thoughts, and feelings.
- o Avoid the sense of isolation which many experience in


- our shame-based, mourning-avoiding culture.
- o Provides emotional, physical, and spiritual support in a safe, nonjudgmental environment.
- o Allows you to explore your thoughts and feelings about grief in a way that helps you be compassionate with yourselves.
- o Encourages members to receive support and understanding but also give back the same to other members.
- o Learn new ways to approach problems with grief.
- o Helps you trust your fellow human beings and bond again from the unsafe, uncaring world during grief.
- o Gives you a forum to search the meaning in life and death.
- o Provides a supportive environment while your zest of life reawakens and give you hope for healing.

Overall, support groups are able to facilitate an atmosphere of giving and receiving without feeling helpless as well as discovering continued meaning in life. Feeling understood

by others also takes a huge burden off the barrier between mourners and the world outside. Support groups can help foster a compassionate environment giving mourners greater capacity to be more patient and gracious to themselves from the inside out. 

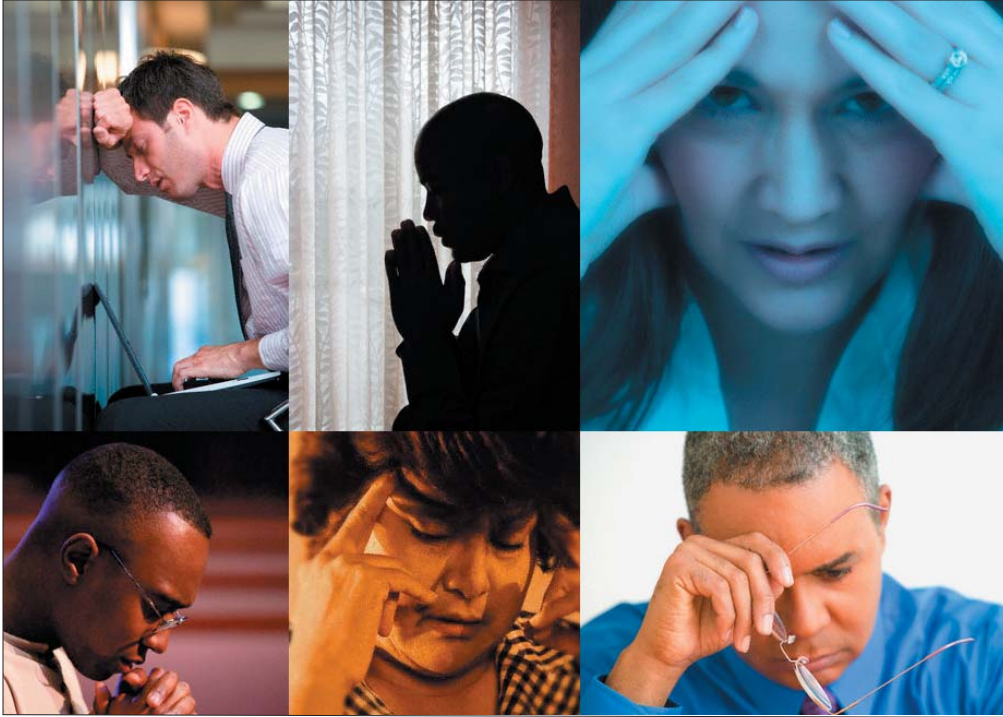


*Haven Hospice partners with Jewish Family and Children Services to bring a new grief support group to the community.*

A new grief support group will be starting September 12, 2008 from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Alpert Jewish Community Center in Long Beach (3801 E. Willow St, Long Beach, Ca). This group will be a safe and supportive place for bereaved persons to share their experiences and feelings related to loss, and will also provide educational information on the grief process. For more information please contact Tina Stephenitch at 562-426-7500 ext 406. Pre-registration is required. 

# The Experience of Grief

Developed by the Hospice Council of Metropolitan Washington



embarrassment you may have felt while grieving.

Eat well and exercise.

Grief is exhausting. To sustain your energy, be sure to maintain a balanced diet. Exercise is also important in sustaining energy. Find a routine that suits you- perhaps walks or bike rides with friends, or in solitude. Clear your mind and refresh your body.

Indulge yourself.

Take naps, read a good book, listen to your favorite music, get a manicure, go to a ball game, rent a movie. Do something that is frivolous, distracting and that you personally find comforting.

## *Prepare for anniversaries*

Many people feel especially “blue” during these periods, and the anniversary date

of the death can be especially painful. Even if you think you’ve progressed, these dates may bring back some of your painful emotions. Make arrangements to be with friends and family members with whom you are comfortable. Plan activities that give you an opportunity to mark the anniversary.

## *Get Help*

Bereavement groups can help you recognize your feelings and put them in perspective. They can also help alleviate the feeling that you are alone. The experience of sharing with others who are in a similar situation can be comforting and reassuring. Sometimes new friendships grow through these groups – even a whole new social network that you did not have before. There are specialized groups for widowed persons, for parents who have lost a child, for victims of drunken drivers, etc. There are also groups that do not specialize. Check with your local hospice or other bereavement support groups for more information. If you find that you are in great distress or in long-term depression, individual or group therapy from a counselor who specializes in grief may be advisable. You can ask your doctor for a referral.

Take active steps to create a new life for yourself.

Give yourself as much time to grieve as you need. Once you find new energy, begin to look for interesting things to do. Take courses, donate time to a cause you support, meet new people, or even find a new job. 🏠

Grieving people have two choices: they can avoid the pain and all the other emotions associated with their loss and continue on, hoping to forget. This is a risky choice, since experience shows that grief, when ignored, continues to cause pain. The other choice is to recognize grieving and seek healing. In order for growth to be possible, it is essential to allow oneself to feel all the emotions that arise, as painful as they may be, and to treat oneself with patience and kindness.

## *Feel the Pain*

Give into it – even give it precedence over other emotions and activities, because grief is a pain that will get in the way later if it is ignored. Realize that grief has no timetable; it is cyclical, so expect the emotions to come and go for weeks, months or even years. While a show of strength is admirable, it does not serve the need to express sadness, even when it comes out at unexpected times and places.

Talk about Your Sorrow.

Take the time to seek comfort from friends who will listen. Let them know you need to talk about your loss. People will understand, although they may not know how to respond. If they change the subject, explain that you need to share your memories and express your sorrow.

## *Forgive Yourself*

For all the things you believe you should have said or done. Also forgive yourself for the anger and guilt and

# Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

Dr. Earl A. Grollman

## *What do I do with my wedding ring?*

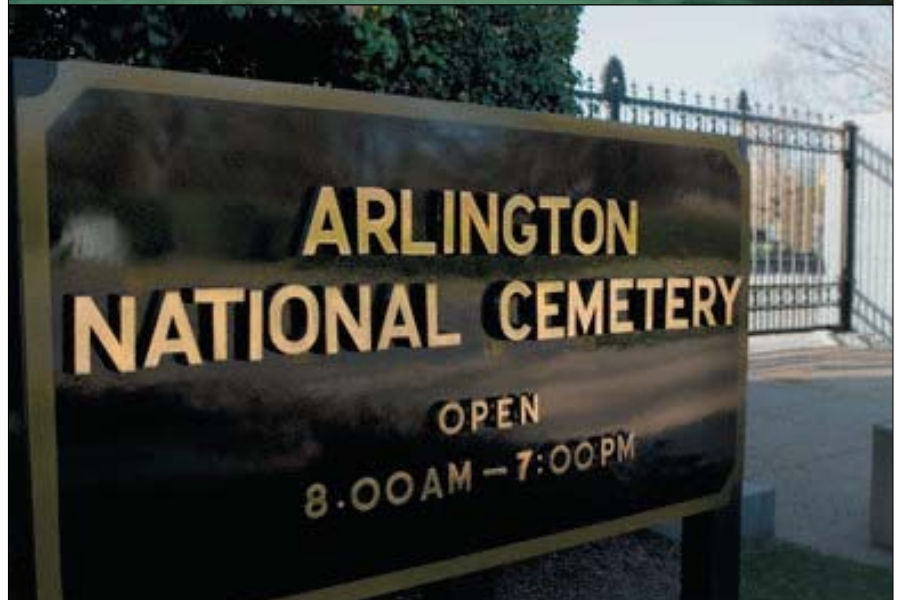
Wedding rings are symbols of one of our most significant relationships. When this relationship is over the loss is not just of a spouse but also a partner, friend, confidante, etc. Our friends and family want to help and don't want to see those they care for hurting. This desire to take the pain away can lead to well intended but bad advice. Many times the advice is to remove the band immediately so as to not be constantly reminded of the loss. The decision to wear or not wear your wedding band is a personal, private, and individual decision. Some people may feel more connected with their spouse by wearing the ring. Others say wearing their wedding band discourages unwanted advances during their time of mourning. Some bereaved spouses may change the look of the jewelry but keep the stone and make it into another piece. Remember, this is your decision and there is no right or wrong choice – as long as it is your own!

## *What do I do with my loved ones belongings?*

After the death of a loved one, there comes a time when you are faced with the task of going through his/her personal belongings. This can be a daunting and unwanted chore. There is no particular time frame for when you must do this. If you aren't ready to begin this process then wait, but remember, you don't want to make a "shrine" of your loved ones belongings. This could seriously hinder you from moving through the grief process. Instead, put the items away until you are ready to go through them. You can always go back to them when you feel stronger.

## *How much time should I spend at the cemetery?*

Spend as much time as you feel comfortable at the cemetery. You might find at first that you want to go frequently. That's fine. Go as often as you want. On the other hand, don't feel guilty if the cemetery is the last place you want to spend time. Some people feel a closeness to their loved one, while others are very uncomfortable in that setting. There are plenty of other ways to remember your loved one and many other places you can go to feel close. Find the one that is right for you.



## *Grief & Loss Seminar Series*

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## *Individual/Group Support*

The Bereavement Department of Haven Hospice offers individual support. For more information or to make an appointment for an individual meeting please contact our Bereavement Coordinator, Tina Stephenitch at (562) 426-7500 ext 406.

## *Volunteers*

Are you ready to become a Haven Hospice Volunteer? If you are interested in this rewarding opportunity, or you know anyone who is looking to volunteer his or her time, please contact Tina Stephenitch, Volunteer Coordinator (562) 426-7500 406.

## *Help us keep our mailing list current!*

If you no longer wish to receive our monthly newsletter or if the address that appears is not current, please email Tina Stephenitch at [tstephen@havenhealth.org](mailto:tstephen@havenhealth.org) or call the office at (562) 426-7500 ext 406. Thank you for your assistance.



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