

LIFT

Grief is a process, not a state. –Anne Grant

August 2020
Bereavement Newsletter

Living Is For Today
West Texas Rehab's Hospice of San Angelo

A Note from Karen

So far, the summer is not turning out the way anyone had hoped or planned, and with the increase of COVID-19 cases in the Concho Valley, the Hospice of San Angelo bereavement team has again suspended all in-person activities, including the support groups and the monthly luncheon. We may be overly cautious, but we respect your health too much to take chances with it. We look forward to gathering in person again when possible. Until then, please know the bereavement staff is available for bereavement support via phone or even computer chats; in addition, we're offering an on-line teenage support group. We'd love to hear from you, so don't hesitate to call 325-658-6524 or email kschmeltekopf@wtrc.com for more information.

May we all be safe and healthy, Karen Schmeltekopf, Director of Bereavement

5 WAYS GRIEF MAY AFFECT YOUR HEALTH

By Pfizer Medical Team, accessed at [getthehealthystayhealthy.com](https://www.getthehealthystayhealthy.com)

Coping with the death of someone you care about may be one of the hardest challenges you face, and not just in terms of your emotional health. The fact is, grief can negatively affect your *physical* health as well. Here are 5 ways grieving can affect you emotionally and physically—and tips for working with your healthcare provider to manage any symptoms that you may have.

1. **Weakened immune system.** Your immune system protects your body against things that can make you sick. The experience of grief can actually impact the immune system. In one study, older adults who had lost a loved one had weakened immune systems compared with those who had not suffered a loss. A weakened immune system may also lead to illness and infections. A study showed that 249 people who lost an infant or child reported a total of 404 acute illnesses during the first year after the death. The most frequent were colds and flu, headaches, anxiety, infections, depression, and angina (severe chest pains).
2. **Heart problems.** A study showed that a person's risk of having a heart attack was 21 times more likely in the first 24 hours after the death of a significant other. After 1 week, the risk was still almost 6 times as likely. The impact may be greatest among individuals at high cardiovascular risk. Stressful life events, such as death of a loved one or divorce, may also lead to a medical condition referred to as *Broken Heart Syndrome*. This is a short-term heart condition in which the heart does not pump normally. It can happen in healthy people. It is believed that a rapid increase in stress hormones (such as adrenaline) can temporarily damage hearts. Symptoms include sudden, intense chest pain. The pain can be so severe it may be mistaken for a heart attack. Broken Heart Syndrome can cause short-term heart muscle failure, but is usually treatable.

3. **Alcohol and substance abuse.** A study that included 235 sons and daughters who had lost a parent showed that they had about a 2.4 times higher risk for alcohol and substance abuse compared to sons and daughters who had not lost a parent.
4. **Depression.** A study found that about 1 in 4 widows and widowers experience clinical depression during the first year after their spouse's death.
5. **Poor sleep.** A series of studies showed that people dealing with grief had trouble falling asleep and staying asleep. This was the case whether the individual was depressed or not. Poor sleep may have a harmful effect on a person's health.

When to Seek Help to Overcome Grief

Sometimes grief can interfere with a person's ability to function in his or her daily life (known as complicated grief). Consider talking with your healthcare provider if, over time, you:

- Have trouble carrying out your normal routines.
- No longer want to participate in social activities.
- Feel depressed or deeply sad.
- Blame yourself or feel guilty.
- Believe that you did something wrong or could have prevented the death.
- Feel like you've lost your sense of purpose in life.
- Feel life isn't worth living anymore.
- Wish you had died too.

Working With Your Healthcare Provider

Grief after the loss of a loved one is normal, and the grieving process may take some time. If you decide that you need help or if you aren't sure you need help in dealing with your grief, reach out to the HOSA bereavement staff, your doctor, or another mental health professional for support. Treatment with psychotherapy (a type of counseling) or medicines may be recommended in persons who have clinical depression as well as complicated grief.

It can be helpful to prepare for your appointments ahead of time. Start by making a list of:

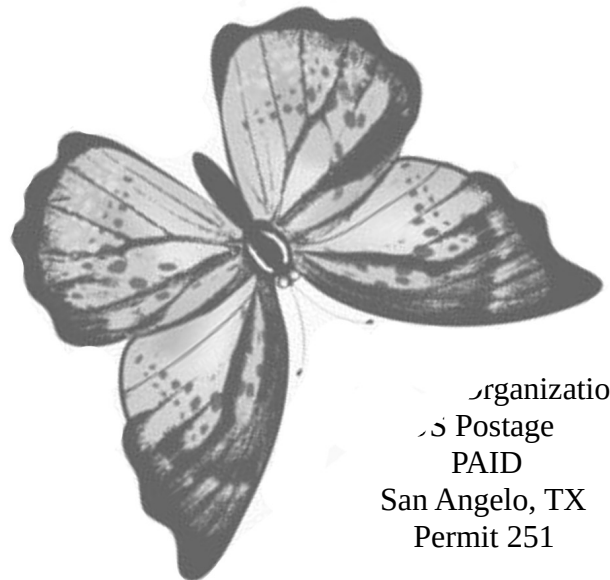
- Symptoms you're having and how long you've had them (e.g., fatigue, depression, changes in appetite).
- Information about any additional major stress or health changes you've had since the loss of your loved one.
- Your medical history.
- The medicines, vitamins, and supplements you're taking, including over-the-counter products.
- Questions you'd like to ask your doctor.

There are also things you can do to help yourself, including:

- Getting regular exercise.
- Eating healthy foods and getting enough rest.
- Learning a new skill.
- Joining a support group.

If you have suicidal thoughts, get immediate help. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255, or call your doctor right away.

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