THE EMOTIONS OF GRIEF

It is common to feel many emotions as you move through your grief. Whatever your emotions are, it is important to express them and remember that there are people who can relate and offer support. People often feel tired, overwhelmed, sad and lonely, but you may also feel any or all of the following emotions at varying levels of intensity.

- **Shock:** This is the feeling that the death is not real, and it protects us from how overwhelming the loss can feel in the beginning.

- **Anger:** Anger can be directed at things such as a medical facility or employee, God, your loved one who died because they have left you, or at the new responsibilities you have had to take on as a result of the death.

- **Relief:** This is very common if you cared for him/her for a long time and you no longer have that responsibility. You may also feel relieved that he/she is no longer in pain.

- **Guilt:** People often feel guilt for different reasons such as something they said or did before the death, the circumstances surrounding the death, or for feeling relief or happiness after the death.

- **Anxiety/Fear:** Anxiety can result from fear or worry about things such as: your own death or the death of other loved ones, the future without your loved one, or never feeling better again.

These feelings and many others are normal after the loss of a loved one, even though they may not feel normal. However, if these feelings are continuing to keep you (or begin to keep you) from doing normal daily tasks, you may want to make an appointment with a counselor, doctor, or BJC Hospice bereavement specialist.

WE ARE HERE FOR YOU ...

The mission of the BJC Hospice bereavement program is to provide grief services to people of all ages who have been affected by the death of a loved one. We strive to build a more compassionate and connected community, facilitate mourning, and foster resilience by providing grief awareness, education, support, resources and hope.

Please contact us for support. We can...

- talk on the phone or meet in person
- provide information about support groups and therapists
- send reading material about grief and loss
- discuss any questions or concerns
- provide information on grief camps and retreats

The Coping Corner

SUGGESTIONS FOR SLEEP

Sometimes sleep can be difficult when you are grieving. Here are some ideas that may help you improve the quality and amount of your sleep.

1. Exercise during the day.
2. Go to bed and get up at regular times.
3. If you can’t sleep after 20-30 minutes in bed, leave your bed and do not return until you are sleepy.
4. Reduce caffeine and nicotine consumption as much as possible.
5. Create a bedtime routine to help you relax.
6. Try using deep relaxation techniques.
7. Avoid non-sleep activities in bed (such as working or reading).
8. Reduce noise by using ear plugs or a noise-making machine.
9. Work on accepting those nights when you do not sleep well.
10. If you suspect that emotional problems are causing sleeplessness, consult a therapist or BJC Hospice bereavement specialist.

Adapted from The Anxiety & Phobia Workbook by Edmund J. Bourne.
FINDING BALANCE IN GRIEF

When someone you love dies, most people expect to experience an emotional reaction. However, a loss can affect you in any of the dimensions shown here in the diagram. Experiencing a reaction in any of these areas can leave you feeling imbalanced. It is important to find ways of healing in each area to restore balance to yourself.

COPING EXERCISE

Sometimes loss is so overwhelming that it’s hard to know where to start to help yourself heal. Here is an exercise that may help.

• Look at the five areas listed in the diagram above.

• How do you experience your grief in each of these five areas? Write an example in each circle. Such as:
  - Mentally – “I forget things.”
  - Physically – “I feel tired.”

• Now, think about concrete things that have helped you heal in the past. Write an example of how you can heal in each circle. Such as:
  - Mentally – “I will make a to-do list every morning.”
  - Physically – “I will take a walk each morning.”

• Each week focus on one area and one way to heal yourself. Sometimes all you need is to take one day at a time, one step at a time, or even one breath at a time!

Adapted from “Loss in the Four Dimensions” by Sr. Teresa McIntyre.
Here are some ways to cope with the effects of grief in the five areas from the diagram. Choose some of the coping tips that feel right for you. Don’t be afraid to try something new either!

**PHYSICAL:** Sometimes grief can come out in physical symptoms. Here are some ways you can take care of yourself physically:

- Drink water and eat healthy foods to nourish your body.
- Take a walk.
- Take deep breaths.
- Ask for a hug.
- Pamper yourself in whatever way feels good to you. Some examples include: read a good book, sit outside on a nice day, get your nails done, take a long shower or bubble bath, or get a massage.

**MENTAL:** Grief can affect your ability to think clearly. You may forget things or get lost driving in areas you have known for years. You may not be able to concentrate or sort out information. Some ideas to help you cope include:

- Make a to-do list if you find yourself easily forgetting things.
- Ask someone you trust to help you sort out any remaining paperwork.
- Learn something new or find a new hobby.
- Take tasks one step at a time.

**EMOTIONAL:** It is important to honor the many emotions of grief. The following are some healthy ways to sort out and express your emotions:

- Write in a journal or write a letter to your loved one.
- Join a support group.
- Ask supportive friends or family members to listen to stories about your loved one.

**SPIRITUAL:** The spiritual part of you includes the fire within you or your inner passion. For some people this involves a specific faith tradition. It is important to heal in this area as well. Some ideas include:

- Pray or meditate.
- Volunteer your time in a way that honors your loved one.
- Attend your church, if you have one, or ask to meet with a spiritual leader.
- Find activities or others that help you find meaning or purpose in your life.

**RELATIONAL:** Every human needs interaction and connection with others. You can often decrease your feelings of grief when you share them with others. Here are some ideas for how to reach out in a healthy way:

- Share memories with friends or family who knew your loved one. This will help them heal too.
- Ask family or friends to do a project with you. Create a scrapbook or a memory garden in honor of your loved one.
- Join an activity club or try a new hobby to form new relationships.
- Invite others to share a meal with you.

Remember that the bereavement team is here to support you in finding coping tools to help bring balance back to your life.

"by Sr. Teresa McIntyre.

Adapted from "Loss in the Four Dimensions" by Sr. Teresa McIntyre.
BJC Hospice offers the following programs at no cost to the community.

**Daybreak** — A one-day grief retreat for couples who have lost a child.

**Labyrinth** — A one-day grief retreat for teens who have experienced the death of a family member or friend.

**Portals and Threshold** — Grief support groups for spouse and partner loss.

**Stepping Stones Camp** — A weekend camp held annually in August for children ages 6-12 who have experienced the death of a family member or friend.

**Weavings** — A weekend retreat held annually in the fall for mothers who have experienced the death of a child.

**Wings on Wheels (W.O.W.)** — A mobile expressive and music therapy program to support individuals, families, and groups impacted by illness and loss.

**Lumina** — A program to help people share their life stories and create legacy projects for loved ones.

For more information, please call 314-953-1676 or email griefsupport@bjc.org