

United Methodist Church Health News November 2011

Grief - The Reaction to Loss

Grief is a normal reaction to loss. Why is it so difficult, then, to face grief, to talk about it, or to figure out what to say to someone else who is grieving? This article was very difficult for me to write this month as I and people in our church are grieving the loss of people in our church family and our own families. So what is this thing we call grief, how do we react to it and how do we reach out to others who are suffering a loss?

Grief according to "Grief, Dying and Death" by Therese Rando, is the process of psychological, social, physical and spiritual reactions to the perception of loss. The loss may be as simple as a child losing a tooth, or as life-changing as the death of a spouse or child. I remember going to a conference in Tucson Arizona and naively leaving jewelry in my hotel room, while going to sessions. I lost some family pieces of jewelry and felt a keen sense of loss while attending a conference on grief!

There are many different interpretations of the process of grief - the travel through the valley. In college I remember learning about Elizabeth Kubler Ross' stages of grief. After our son died I would be feeling angry and saying to myself - now I am in the anger stage and - good that will be over and I can move on and get through all these stages. But it didn't work that way. Going through the valley has many ups and downs and I don't think, now that "stages" work in grief. Others have described "tasks" or "phases". These are more general and usually start with a time of shock or numbness. The task here is to accept the reality of the loss - which can take some time. Next the person needs to work through the pain of the loss, with many emotions that go along with that part of the journey.

Romans 12: 14-16

"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another"



This is phase of "confrontation". The next task is to adjust to the environment where the loved one is missing. This is the "reestablishment" phase. Grief can be a long journey and last a long time. As Rando says as long as the grieving is not dysfunctional or harmful it can vary from person to person. For some people grieving the loss of a person very close to them can be intense grief for 6 months to a year and residual for 3 years. For others it can be much shorter. There is no time table to grief.

So, how do people react to grief? What are some of the social and physical symptoms people have?

- Restlessness and inability to sit still
- A painful lack of ability to initiate and maintain organized patterns of activity
- Social withdrawal
- Lack of appetite and other GI symptoms
- Loss of weight or gaining weight
- Inability to sleep
- Crying
- Tendency to sigh
- Physical Exhaustion
- Lack of energy, feelings of emptiness and heaviness
- Shortness of breath

So what can we do with this thing we call "grief" with ourselves and with others? It is important to do the grief work and allow others to do the same. You cannot do another person's grief work for them. As a friend you may feel uncomfortable with your friends grief, but try as you might you cannot "fix" them. As you work through grief it is important to find someone to talk to, or to be able to express feelings in a non-

judgmental way through journaling, artistic expression, or physical activity. Telling your story many times, or listening to others tell their stories is very healing. Even if you have heard the story many times before, keep listening and let the person know how significant their loss is. That is a very important step in the journey of grief. And remember to mention the loved one's name - those who grieve do not want their loved ones to be forgotten. Rituals can be very important to those who grieve. Even lighting a candle or planting a tree or letting a balloon go can help with the process of healing. So as the Bible verse says - weep with those who weep - walk beside them on their journey but let them lead the way.

Many blessings to those who are on the journey of grief...

News Bits

- **Blood Pressure check** Sunday November 6th after both services
- **Parish Nurse hours** at church 10am - 2pm on Thursdays
- **Parkinson Support Group** November 3rd at 1pm. Bay Pharmacy Home Medical Department -Lori Christel
- **Grief - The Reaction to Loss** Adult Forum topic November 13th, 9am in lounge.



Grief Support in Door County

The Compassionate Friends - a group for parents, grandparents and siblings whose child of any age has died. Call Carol at 743-3476 with questions.

Grief Share a 12 week video and discussion program at St. Peter's Lutheran Church. Call 743-4431 to register.

Arise a five week bereavement program offered in the Spring at St. Joseph's Catholic Church. Call 743-2062 for information

Unity Hospice offers five week programs twice a year. Call Lisa at 743-6440 for a current schedule.