

# Coping with Loss When a Loved One Dies



HOSPICE  
BY THE BAY

*Caring for Generations*

*Serving Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo and Sonoma counties*



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# Coping with Loss

## When a Loved One Dies

**Hospice By The Bay** realizes that the weeks and months following a death are difficult. We want you to know that you have our ongoing support and concern for your well-being as you make your way through these days.

We offer you and your family bereavement services that include individual and group counseling, educational materials on grief and loss, and referrals to other community resources.

We also encourage you to share feelings with friends and family who can listen supportively. Many people experience a variety of physical and emotional discomforts in the early months following a significant loss, and talking to others can help ease your discomfort.

We hope that the materials in this booklet about grief and loss are helpful to you. Please call on us for support. We're here to help.

On behalf of Hospice By The Bay's staff and volunteers, please know that our thoughts are with you.

Sincerely,

*The Hospice By The Bay Bereavement Team*

MARIN, SAN FRANCISCO AND SAN MATEO COUNTIES:  
(415) 526-5699, ext. 8500

SONOMA COUNTY:  
(707) 526-5699, ext. 8500



## Our Philosophy

Grief is the normal reaction we all have to loss. It is a natural, universal, and stressful experience. Bereavement refers to the period of time following a loss during which people adapt to the many changes involved in going on with life without the person who has died.

Each person's grief is unique and is felt and expressed in individual ways. Grieving people have varied needs, and it is because of these individual differences that Hospice offers a variety of bereavement services to family members. The Hospice By The Bay Bereavement Program is designed to provide people with education and opportunities for support so that they can move ahead toward a healthy adjustment to life following the death of a loved one.

Family members served by Hospice are notified of coming bereavement events. Many counseling services are available to them at no charge. Counseling services for community members are available on a sliding scale.

Hospice By The Bay does not discriminate in the provision of care on the basis of race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, color, age, handicap, ethnicity or ability to pay.



HOSPICE  
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# Bereavement Services

Hospice By The Bay's Bereavement Program offers:

## **Support Groups**

Groups provide family members with an opportunity for emotional support, sharing feelings, education about the grief process, and ways to cope with loss. Both day and evening groups are offered. Some groups meet once a week for several weeks in succession and others are on a one-time basis. Call Hospice or check our web site at [www.hospicebythebay.org](http://www.hospicebythebay.org) for dates and schedules.

## **Individual Counseling**

This service, available to family members before and following the patient's death, provides counseling with a Hospice By The Bay counselor, who offers support and guidance through the grief process. Sessions are usually held weekly and focus on issues related to grief and its effects. Community members who are anticipating or have experienced the death of a family member or loved one are also eligible for services, on a sliding fee-scale basis.

## **Bereavement Volunteers**

Specifically trained volunteers are available to Hospice family members to provide emotional support and practical assistance.

## **Hospice Youth Program**

This unique program offers support to grieving children ages 4 to 18. Individual and family counseling are available, as well as periodic support groups. The creative arts and play are used extensively. In addition, we offer school presentations both for children and faculty, and grief



support groups on-site at schools. We also have a camp program one weekend each summer.

### **Information and Referral**

Counseling staff are available by phone to provide information about community resources for chronic illness, end-of-life care, grief and loss.

### **Spiritual Services**

Our Spiritual Support Counselors are available to talk with those who are bereaved.



### **Grief Education**

Regularly scheduled presentations are offered in which Hospice By The Bay staff members present information about the complexities of the grief process. The emphasis is on practical information and is designed to assist with identifying effects of grief and adjusting to loss. Special concerns, such as how to cope with holidays and other significant dates, are addressed. Printed materials are distributed for further information.

### **Service of Remembrance**

Services of Remembrance are held each year in memory of those who have died. This service is ecumenical in nature and includes music, readings and prayers. It is open to the community and offers an opportunity to join with others in remembering loved ones who have died.

### **Lending Library**

Hospice maintains a library of books, audio cassettes, CDs and videotapes on loss, grief and bereavement, which both adults and children have found helpful.



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# Characteristics of Grief

Because grief can be so painful and seem so overwhelming, it frightens us. Many people wonder if they are grieving in the “right” way and if what they are experiencing is normal. Many people who suffer a loss experience some of the following:

## Physical Characteristics

- A tightness in the throat or general bodily tension; frequent sighing.
- A loss of appetite and/or increased eating.
- A chronic feeling of tiredness and/or muscle weakness, numbness.
- Feeling dizzy, short of breath, or headachy.
- Because these symptoms can also be signs of health problems, we recommend that you have a physical examination sometime early in your grief process and consult your physician if the symptoms persist.

## Emotional Characteristics

- Feeling numb or in shock. Expecting to see the loved one, even though the person is gone.
- Feeling depressed and sad, that life has no meaning.
- Feeling isolated and separated from others.
- Feeling angry at God.
- Feeling angry at and abandoned by the one who died.
- Feeling anger toward others whose lives seem happy.
- Experiencing sudden changes of mood.
- Crying at unexpected times.
- Feeling a yearning for life as it used to be.
- Spending much time reviewing the past.
- Feeling apathetic, with loss of interest in usual activities.



- Feeling guilt over real or imagined wrongdoings.
- Feeling guilt over times when you were happy.
- Feeling fearful of the uncertainty of life without your loved one, as well as afraid of dying or having other loved ones die.
- An upsurge of emotional distress at anniversary dates, birthdays, and other special occasions.

### **Behavioral Characteristics**

- Difficulty going to sleep or staying asleep. Vivid dreams about the person who died, or the absence of dreaming.
- Replaying memories of the person's last days, weeks or hours.
- Lowered self-esteem.
- Restlessness. Difficulty concentrating and making decisions.
- Forgetfulness. Starting things and not remembering what you were doing.
- Sensing the presence of the one who died, sometimes expecting her/him to return.
- An urge to fill the days with constant activity/busy-ness.
- Decreased desire for socializing.
- Lowered interest in sexual activity.
- Sometimes during grieving, there is a tendency to use alcohol or drugs more than usual. This way of responding to pain is not helpful in the long run because it delays grief rather than resolving it.

The above are all natural and normal grief responses. It is important to give yourself enough time to cry and to talk with people about your experience.

**If you are concerned or worried about your reactions or need someone to talk with, please call us.**



# Losing Someone Close Changes Your Life

Pain differs, depending on who you lose:

## **A Parent**

You may feel “abandoned.” You may also feel more vulnerable about dying yourself.

## **A Partner or Spouse**

No longer part of a couple, you may feel isolated and insecure.

## **A Child**

You may unjustly blame yourself because you were not capable of “saving” your child.

## **An Unborn Child**

You may feel robbed of your dreams and hopes for the future.

## **Companions in Life**

Loss of intimacy can be excruciating when grieving for:

- siblings and other close relatives,
- friends,
- co-workers,
- beloved family pets.





## Self Care

Here are some ideas you may find helpful during the time you are grieving the loss of your loved one.

- Get sufficient rest.
- Acknowledge your emotions as they arise. Allow yourself to move naturally in and out of your pain.
- Be gentle with yourself. Pamper yourself.
- Lower your expectations of yourself; you will not be functioning up to par.
- Give yourself permission to suspend unnecessary activities and to say no.
- Postpone major decisions.
- Keep a journal. Express your feelings in writing.
- Cultivate a supportive environment of friends who will listen and not judge. Accept comfort from others.
- Eat nutritious meals, and take a vitamin supplement if needed.
- Exercise daily: take walks, jog, bicycle, etc.
- Take a meditation class, or join a prayer group.
- Look to your faith for comfort.
- Get a massage or back rub.
- Have a manicure or pedicure.
- Release your anger. Scream in your car, or beat your bed with a tennis racket.
- Bring something into your life that is alive: a cat, fish, plant, flowers, etc.





- Realize that you know best what is good for you. Listen to yourself.
- Buy a double dip ice cream cone.
- Allow yourself plenty of crying time.
- Buy something for yourself that you would really enjoy.
- Nurture a sense of humor.
- Soak in a hot bath.
- Do something “crazy” or unusual.
- Read.
- Travel, even if only locally.
- Listen to music.
- Go to a movie, play or art gallery.
- Take a class.
- Garden.
- Join a grief and loss support group through your local Hospice By The Bay, your church, a mental health agency or a community organization.
- Stay connected with your loved one through sharing memories, keeping a scrapbook, carrying out rituals in your loved one’s memory, or completing a project he or she started.
- Take a few moments daily to think of what is still beautiful or meaningful to you.



**Just a reminder — if at anytime you experience unusual symptoms, see your physician.**



# Myths About Grief

From: *How to Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies*,  
By Therese A. Rando, Ph.D.

Some misconceptions and incorrect ideas about the grieving process:

- All losses are the same.
- All bereaved people grieve in the same way.
- Rituals and funerals are unimportant in helping us deal with life and death in contemporary America.
- Being upset and grieving means that you do not believe in God or trust your religion or faith.
- Grief will affect you only psychologically.
- It is unimportant for you to have social support in your grief.
- You can find ways to avoid the pain of your grief and still resolve it successfully.
- It takes two months to get over your grief.
- Grief always declines over time in a steadily decreasing fashion.
- When grief is resolved, it never comes up again.
- Family members will always help grievers.
- You and your family will be the same after the death as before your loved one died.
- You will have no relationship with your loved one after the death.





- The intensity and length of your grief are testimony to your love for the deceased.
- There is something wrong if you do not always feel close to your other family members, since you should be happy that they are still alive.
- There is something wrong with you if you think that part of you has died with your loved one.
- When you grieve the death of a loved one, you only grieve for the loss of that person and nothing else.
- If you are a widow, you should grieve like other widows.
- Losing someone to sudden death is the same as losing someone to an anticipated death.
- You will not be affected much if your parent dies when you are an adult.
- Once your loved one has died, it is better not to focus on them, but to put them in the past and go on with your life.
- Children grieve like adults.
- Infant death shouldn't be too difficult to resolve because you didn't know the child for very long.
- Children need to be protected from grief and death.
- If someone has lost a spouse, he or she knows what it is like losing a child.
- Parents usually divorce after a child dies.
- When in doubt about what to say to a bereaved person, offer a cliché.
- Feeling sorry for yourself is not allowable.
- It is better to tell bereaved people to “be brave” and “keep a stiff upper lip” because then they will not have to experience as much pain.



- It is better to put painful things out of your mind.
- You should not think about your loved one at holidays because it will make you too sad.
- Bereaved individuals only need to express their feelings and they will resolve their grief.
- Expressing feelings that are intense is the same as losing control.
- There is no reason to be angry at people who tried to do their best for your loved one.
- There is no reason to be angry at your loved one who has died.

**How many of the statements above do you believe?**

**Each one of them is a MYTH.**

**NONE of these statements are true.**

**These feelings are all NORMAL.**

Yet if you believe that they are true, you will expect yourself to act and feel according to what you believe. If you, for example, think it is wrong to be angry at your loss, or to be sad during the holidays, you will be putting an additional burden on yourself, which you don't need at this time.

### **Appropriate Expectations for Yourself When Feeling Grief**

- Your grief will take longer than most people think.
- Your grief will take on more energy than you would have ever imagined.
- Your grief will involve many changes and be continually developing.



- Your grief will show itself in all spheres of your life— psychological, social, physical, and spiritual.
- Your grief will depend upon how you perceive the loss.
- You will grieve for what you have lost already and for what you have lost for the future.
- Your grief will entail mourning not only for the actual person you lost, but also for all of the hopes, dreams and unfulfilled expectations you held for and with that person, and for the needs that will go unmet because of the death.
- You will feel some anger and guilt or at least some manifestation of these emotions.
- You may feel a lack of self-concern.
- You may experience grief spasms, acute upsurges of grief that occur suddenly with no warning.
- You will have trouble thinking (memory, organization and intellectual processing) and making decisions.
- You may begin a search for meaning and may question your religion and/or philosophy of life.
- You may find yourself having physical reactions.
- Society will have unrealistic expectations about your mourning and may respond inappropriately to you.
- Your grief will involve a wide variety of feelings and reactions, not solely those that are generally thought of as grief, such as depression and sadness.
- The loss will resurrect old issues, feelings, and unresolved conflicts from the past.





- You will have some identity confusion as a result of this major loss and the fact that you are experiencing reactions that may be quite different for you.
- You may experience a combination of anger and depression, with feelings such as irritability, frustration, annoyance, or intolerance.
- You may find that there are certain dates, events, and stimuli that bring upsurges in grief.
- Certain experiences later in life may temporarily resurrect intense grief for you.
- You may feel like you are going crazy.

In summary, your grief will bring with it, depending upon the combination of factors above, an intense amount of emotion that will surprise you and those around you. Most of us are unprepared for the global response we have to a major loss. Our expectations tend to be too unrealistic, and more often than not we receive insufficient assistance from friends and society.



Your grief will not only be more intense than you expected, but it will also be manifested in more areas and ways than you ever anticipated. You can expect to see brief upsurges

of it at anniversary and holiday times, and in response to certain stimuli that remind you of what you have lost.

Your grief will be idiosyncratic and dependent upon the meaning of your loss, your own personal characteristics, the type of death, your social support, and your physical state.



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# Eight Myths About Children, Adolescents, and Loss

*By Kenneth J. Doka, Ph.D., M.Div.*

- 1. Children do not grieve, or only grieve when they reach a certain age.**

Children grieve at any age. The way grief is manifested will vary, depending on the child's age, development and experiences.

- 2. The death of a loved one is the only major loss that children and adolescents experience.**

Children and adolescents experience a range of losses. The loss of a pet, dreams, separations by divorce or relocations, losses of friends or relationships, as well as losses due to illness or death can generate grief reactions.

- 3. It is better to shield children from loss. They are too young to experience tragedy.**

Although we'd like to protect children from loss, it is impossible. Exclusion can increase fears and breed feelings of resentment and helplessness. We can support, teach and model our own ways of adapting to loss and include, rather than exclude, children and adolescents.

- 4. Children should not go to funerals, or children should always attend funerals.**

Children and adolescents should have the choice as to how they wish to participate in funeral rituals. They will need information, options, and support.



**5. Children get over loss quickly.**

No one gets over significant loss. Children, like adults, will learn to live with the loss and may revisit that loss at different points in their development.

**6. Children are permanently scarred by early, significant loss.**

Most people, including children, are resilient. While loss can affect development, solid support and strong continuity of care can assist children as they learn to live with loss.

**7. Talking with children and adolescents is the most effective approach to dealing with loss.**

While there is much value in openly communicating verbally with children and adolescents, there are approaches that allow the child or adolescent creative ways of expression. Play, art, dance, music, activity and ritual are examples of creative modes of expression that they may use to express grief and adapt to loss.

**8. Helping children and adolescents deal with loss is the responsibility of the family.**

Families do have a critical responsibility. But it is a responsibility shared with other individuals and organizations such as hospices, schools, faith communities — as well as the community at large. In times of significant loss, it is important to remember that the ability of family members to support one another can be limited.





# Hospice By The Bay Youth Bereavement Program

## Individual and Group Counseling

- Individual and Family Grief Support and Bereavement Counseling
- Special Group Workshops
- Annual Youth Grief Support Camp



## School Programs

- Grief Support and Education Groups
- Educational Classroom Presentations
- Faculty Trainings
- Crisis Intervention/Stress Management

## Community Outreach

- Training for Community Agency Staff, Counseling Students and Interns
- Community groups
- Lending Library
- Educational Literature



# I Am Doing As Well As I Can For Today

When I'm feeling ...

guilty

crazy

lonely

scared

disoriented

forgetful

overwhelmed

And I feel I have ...

no motivation

no appetite

no interests

Or that I should ...

be dealing with this better

pull myself together

not burden my friends

When I ...

can't sleep

don't breathe normally

catch cold easily

worry about my future

am consumed with my loss

I can turn this page and

tell myself...



I am doing as well as I can for today.

I will try to understand that grief is a  
natural reaction to loss.

I will take good care of myself.

I will be gentle with myself.

I can cry if I need to.

I can have my feelings (whatever they may be).

I have the courage to ask for help when necessary.

I can talk about my grief with people I trust.

I did the best I could at the time for my loved one.

I will “get on with my life” when I am ready.

I will take one day at a time.

I am strong and have more inner  
resources than I think.

I will heal and recover.

*(author unknown)*



## A Recipe for Grief

If you choose to follow this recipe  
you can trace your whole life's arc —  
open every cupboard wide, and  
measure your ingredients  
with compassion. Just this once,  
leave judgment sitting on its shelf

Now  
take a loss,  
any loss,  
any loss will do  
and place it on the altar of your heart

Don't leave anything out —  
into the bowl of your empty hands  
sift memories—sweet, sour, bitter, salt  
crack open all your regrets  
and every if only

Using tears, as many as you need —  
and more, the bowl will hold them —  
make a smooth, molten batter  
now let it rest, there is nothing  
more to do

When you are ready  
hold tight to patience and courage  
and plunge deep  
gathering whatever is left

Then taste,  
and taste,  
taste your grief  
season it well with your longing

Turn your pain over and over  
in your loneliness  
until the bitter sweetness fills your senses  
and the love consumes your heart

By *Penelope Wisner*  
with *Carol Schlesinger*



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# Bereavement Bibliography

You can find many of these titles in *Hospice By The Bay's*  
Library of Hope in Larkspur, (415) 927-2273.

## Books for Adults

- All books written by: ..... Mitch Albom  
*Transitions* ..... William Bridges  
*Final Gifts* ..... M. Callanan & P. Kelley  
*How to Survive the Loss of a Love* ..... Colgrove & Bloomfield  
*Living When a Loved One Has Died* and  
*What Helped Me When My Loved One Died* ..... Earl Grollman  
*Grieving For Dummies: Empowering Advice for*  
*Coping with the Loss of a Loved One* ..... Greg Harvey, PhD  
*Up From Grief: Patterns of Recovery* ..... Kreis & Patti  
All books written by: ..... Elizabeth Kubler-Ross  
*When Bad Things Happen to Good People* ..... Harold S. Kushner  
*Who Dies? Meetings at the Edge* ..... Stephen Levine  
*A Grief Observed* ..... C.S. Lewis  
*How to Go On Living When a Loved One has Died* ..... T. Rando  
*Stepping Stones to Grief Recovery* ..... Debra Routh  
*Living Through Mourning* ..... Harriet Schiff  
*Men And Grief* ..... Carol Staudacher  
*Living Through Personal Crisis* ..... J. Stearns  
*The Courage to Grieve* and  
*You Don't Have to Suffer* ..... Judy Tatelbaum  
*Necessary Losses* ..... Judith Viorst  
*Art Of Condolence* ..... L. & H. Zunin



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## **Novels**

- The Love Season* ..... Elin Hilderbrand  
*Good Grief* ..... Lolly Winston

## **Parental Loss**

- Motherless Daughters*..... Hope Edelman  
*Losing A Parent* ..... Alexandra Kennedy  
*Learning to Say Goodbye: When a Parent Dies* ..... Eda LeShan  
*When Parents Die: A Guide for Adults*..... E. Myers  
*Losing Your Parent, Finding Yourself*..... Victoria Secunda

## **Loss of a Child**

- Climb Toward Understanding*..... P. Davis  
*Beyond Endurance: When a Child Dies*..... R. Knapp  
*Finding Hope When a Child Dies* ..... Sukie Miller  
*The Bereaved Parent* ..... Harriet Schiff  
*When Your Child is Gone, Learning to Live Again* ..... F. Toder

## **Loss of a Spouse**

- Being a Widow*..... L. Caine  
*Grace And Grit* ..... Ken Wilbur  
*The Year of Magical Thinking*..... Joan Didion  
*Suddenly Alone: A Woman's Guide to Widowhood* ..... P. Gates  
*Seven Choices: Taking the Steps to New Life after  
Losing Someone You Love* ..... E.H. Neeld  
*Starting Over: Help for Young Widows and Widowers* ..... A.E. Nudel

## **Suicide**

- Silent Grief: Living in the Wake of Suicide*..... Lukas & Seide



## Children and Grief

*The Dead Bird* ..... Margaret Wise Brown  
Children find a suitable burial for a dead bird (age 3-8).

*The Fall of Freddie the Leaf* ..... Leo Buscaglia  
Death is presented as a natural part of life (age 2-8).

*Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs* ..... T. DePaola  
A heartwarming story about Tom whose great-grandmother is gone when he goes upstairs to visit her.

*My Grandpa Died Today* ..... Joan Fassler  
A Jewish boy and his grandpa talk about death. The story includes a child's perspective of adult grief and death.

*Part of Me Died, Too* ..... Virginia Lynn Fry  
A group of older children tell their stories of losing family members and friends.

*Tell Me Papa* ..... J. & M. Johnson  
A grandparent gives a detailed explanation of what happens when someone dies and the meaning of the funeral.

*How It Feels When a Parent Dies* ..... Jill Krentenz  
Ages 7-16 talk about their experience with a parent's death.

*No One Can Ever Steal Your Rainbow* ..... Barbara Meislin  
A girl experiences loss, but finds hope through her own inner strength. Music CD with healing song included.

*Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain*

*Death to Children* ..... B. Mellonie & R. Ingpen  
Beautifully told and illustrated, suitable for ages 3-10.

*Annie and the Old One* ..... Miska Miles  
A Navajo grandmother teaches about the acceptance of death.

*The Tenth Good Thing about Barney* ..... Judith Viorst  
A child grieves the death of a cat (ages 4-8).



*My Grandson Lew*..... Charlotte Zolotow  
A young boy remembers his grandfather.

### **For Children about the AIDS Virus**

*Come Sit With Me* ..... D. Merrifield, M.D.  
*Z's Gift* ..... N. Starkman  
*Children and the AIDS Virus* ..... R. Hausherr

### **For Adults Talking to Children**

*Why Did Daddy Die? Helping a Child Cope*

*With the Loss of a Parent* ..... Linda Alderman  
A widow with two small children shares her personal story  
and practical advice.

*The Grieving Child* ..... Helen Fitzgerald  
A guide for explaining death to children.

*Seasons of Grief: Helping Children*

*Grow Through Loss* ..... Donna Gaffney  
A family therapist wrote this for parents and educators to  
help children through the entire mourning period.

*Talking About Death: A Dialogue Between*

*Parent and Child*..... Earl Grollman

*When a Friend Dies: A Book for Teens*

*about Grieving and Healing* ..... Marilyn Grotman





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# *Your Notes and Questions*



# HOSPICE BY THE BAY

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*Caring for Generations*

## MARIN

17 East Sir Francis Drake Boulevard  
Larkspur, CA 94939  
(415) 927-2273

## SAN FRANCISCO AND SAN MATEO

1902 Van Ness Avenue, 2nd Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94109  
(415) 626-5900

## SONOMA

190 West Napa Street  
Sonoma, CA 95476  
(707) 935-7504

[www.hospicebythebay.org](http://www.hospicebythebay.org)