

## Resources

### Local Resources:

- ♥ Haven of Northern VA [havenofnova.org](http://havenofnova.org) 703-941-7000
- ♥ Point of Hope Grief Counseling Center  
[Pointofhope.org](http://Pointofhope.org) 800-255-3042



### On the Web:

- ♥ [Griefnet.org](http://Griefnet.org)
- ♥ [Growthhouse.org/death](http://Growthhouse.org/death)
- ♥ [Helpguide.org/mental/grief\\_loss](http://Helpguide.org/mental/grief_loss)
- ♥ [Americanhospice.org](http://Americanhospice.org) section on grief and faith

*“Every loss demands that we choose life again. One by one you let go of the things that are gone and you mourn for them. One by one you take hold of the things that have become a part of who you are and build again.”*

Rachel Naomi Remen, *My Grandfather's Blessings*, New York: Riverhead Books, 2000.

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Articles in this newsletter are not a substitute for the care and advice of medical professionals. When you have a question or need medical advice, diagnosis or treatment, consult your physician.

This newsletter is produced by Inova Health System in conjunction with your faith community. If you prefer not to receive this newsletter, please notify the appropriate personnel in your faith community.

Inova Health System is a not-for-profit health care system based in Northern Virginia that consists of hospitals and other health services including emergency and urgent care centers, home care, nursing homes, mental health, blood donor services, and wellness classes. Governed by a voluntary board of community members, Inova's mission is to improve the health of the diverse community we serve through excellence in patient care, education and research.



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HealthSource,  
Community  
Health Division*



# For Your Health

## The Journey of Grief

As the leaves have lain in colored patterns on the ground and now may be sprinkled with snow in the cycle of the seasons, so we pass through many cycles and patterns in our life journeys. The winter months where the growth is below ground, the holiday gatherings where family and friends may be absent, the review of the year past as the new year turns, may all prompt the awareness of the journey of grief in our lives.

Grieving well is a sign of health. Not grieving can make us vulnerable to diseases of body, mind, and spirit. All major religions and spiritual traditions address suffering, loss, and grief.

### May You Grieve With Hope.

Grief is a response to love.

To grieve is a gift because it means you have loved.

Those who never grieve have never loved and had nothing to lose.

Rachel Naomi Remen writes, “Grieving may be one of the most fundamental of life skills. It is the way that the heart can heal from loss and go on to love again and grow wise. If it were up to me, it would be taught in kindergarten, right up there with taking turns and sharing.”

The loss suffered may be of a person, a pet, a job, or a dream or a hope. It may be the changes of life transitions. Oddly enough in some people's minds is that “good” events lead to grief—the promotion at work, the birth of a baby, the fun of a holiday. Every change is both a loss and a gain, an opening and a closing.

## Is My Grieving Normal?

There is no “normal” grief. Each person experiences what they experience. It is usually comforting, though, to know that what you are going through is not unique to you. You are not alone if you experience shock, numbness, and isolation when the loss first occurs. You are in the company of most others according to studies if you find yearning for the lost person or situation. Most persons experience some disorganization, despair, anger, sadness, anxiety, sorrow, depression. The body hurts; you may have difficulty with eating and sleeping. Then over time, with care and attention, gradually you will be able to stand with those also experiencing acceptance, reorganization, recovery, new life and energy.

Resist putting a time table on grief or letting others do so. It is never “over”. You will learn to walk with a prosthesis where your heart was torn.

Loss can be transformed and meaning can be made from it. It may be the hardest struggle of your life. Yet gradually the gift can be found. We learn to have a new relationship of the spirit when the body of one we love is no longer present. We learn to live in a new world without the person or the desired situation. Gradually we have less pain, are able to see options and possibilities, can identify and empathize with others, have a renewed sense of well-being and hope.

## “Tasks of Grief”

“Working through” grief takes a lot of energy. May you:

- ♥ Gradually accept the reality of the loss
- ♥ Experience the pain of the loss, work through the emotions, validate the experience
- ♥ Adjust to a changed world, reinvest and redirect your energies
- ♥ Transform the loss, stretch and rebuild faith and meanings in life challenged by the loss



## It May Help To Know That. . .

- ♥ A traumatic loss requires more time, more healing and, if necessary, specialized care. Often you may experience more shock, fear and anxiety.
- ♥ “Disenfranchised or socially unacceptable” grief requires more empathy and understanding. Guilt and shame may be present so be especially gentle with yourself and others.
- ♥ Be alert to drug or alcohol use or any addictive behavior that covers over rather than allows experiencing the pain.
- ♥ Get immediate help for anyone whose pain is so deep they consider harming themselves or someone else.

## What Can I Do For Myself?

- ♥ Try to eat well and stay hydrated, get rest and exercise.
- ♥ Be gentle with yourself, experience what you experience.
- ♥ Honor the person, your experience, the love.
- ♥ Use your spiritual resources. Know that God is close to the brokenhearted.

## How Can I Support Another?

- ♥ Be there. Stay in touch for the long haul of months and years.
- ♥ Listen.
- ♥ Empathize. Validate experience.
- ♥ Don’t give platitudes. Silent support is better than clichés such as ‘he/she is in a better place’.
- ♥ Mobilize those who need some sort of action. In general, men may tend to need focused activity.

