GRIEVING A FRIEND

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- Listing of St. Mary’s Grief Support Services (GSS)
Now I am setting out into the unknown.
It will take me a long while to work through the grief.
There are no shortcuts, it has to be gone through.
-Madeline L’Engle

Losing a Friend
Two million people die each year in the United States. Assuming that each person who
dies has a range of 3-5 close friends, it makes sense that the idea of loss and the death of
a friend is widespread. Everyone is hungry for meaningful relationships in this life, and
nurturing friendships comes secondhand to everyone who needs support in their life. Our
friends can be our second families, they can be our support system, they can be our
sounding board for problems. Some people don’t have the friends they used to. Their
spouse may be their best friend and the loss of this person can hit them extremely hard.

Friends may act as a person’s surrogate family – they can accept, support, and love you in
ways your blood relatives may not. In an age when adult family members often live in
different cities, states, or countries and when people often are between spouses or not in a
committed romantic relationship, you probably rely on your close friends to fill many of
the significant support roles in your life.

Good friends understand you better than your family does because you share common
interests and experiences with your friends. Friends are an extension of family rather
than a replacement in most cases.

Losing a close friend may affect each of us differently. Women tend to create richer
social networks and to share their emotions with each other more than men do. Male
friendships tend to focus on common interests and participating in activities together.

Even a loss of someone who wasn’t a close friend can be difficult. The death of a friend
can often stir up fears regarding our own sense of mortality.

Difficulties During Grieving
“Even a friendship that is not intense – one that is based on some friendly backslapping
or a walk to the corner newsstand – can be experienced as an intense loss to someone to
whom the interaction offered a stable routine or a recognition of self.” -Grieving the
Death of a Friend

What to expect while grieving:
Initially disbeliefing the loss
Slowly accepting the loss as real
Surviving the grip of new grief
Dealing with overwhelming emotions
Learning self care strategies to help cope with adjusting to significant losses
Misconceptions about Grieving

● There are no stages in the grieving process. The grieving process has both ups and downs, hard moments and easier moments.

● There is no time limit to grieving. Deaths aren’t something you can simply get over. Participating in grieving can help someone heal, but there is no turning point where you will feel completely normal and “over” a death.

● No two people grieve the same way. Try not to hold yourself to expectations of others, as you are an individual with your own trials to go through.

● Children and adults do not grieve in the same manner. Children tend to grieve in small doses, followed by play and distraction. They may not have the words to express how they are feeling, but they are indeed grieving.

● Grief cannot be avoided. It waits for you and eventually demands your attention. Approaching grief is often scary, and you may fear that it will upset you and others around you. But the pain is already there, and nothing can make it worse. Denial will not relieve the present anxiety – expression will.

● Grief may isolate you from your family and friends. Keeping everything private and personal will not make the pain go away, although it may seem hidden to outsiders.

● At times, people who are grieving may feel like having fun or laughing. You may need this. Fear of being judged or of piling on more guilt may prevent this. It’s okay to take breaks from the exhausting work of grief.
Exercise and Nutrition

- Exercise can make you focus on your health and your body rather than what has happened.
- Going for a walk can brighten mood and alleviate tension.
- Finding someone to exercise with can make you more motivated to get moving. Even just walking around the neighborhood will turn your focus elsewhere.
- Try to eat about three meals a day, even if it is difficult. You may feel like eating is too difficult, and you may not have an appetite. It is important to still eat, or you won’t have energy to make it through the day.
- Trying to include all the food groups is important, without proper nutrition you won’t feel alert and energetic.
- Karate, yoga, cardio, and gardening or any physical activity can help relieve emotional pain and increase energy level simultaneously.

Things that may help you feel better:

- Spend time with family and friends, grief support group members or others who are supportive listeners.
- Accept offers of support and assistance.
- Communicate your feelings and needs rather than expecting others to read your mind.
- Try to be gentle with yourself and others.
- Balance meaningful activity with an increased need to rest physically and emotionally.

Express your grief creatively

- Create a list of all the things you’re missing about your friend.
- Add things that you’re pretty sure you’re going to keep missing over time.
- List everything that you have learned from this person.
- List the ways that your life was better because you knew this person.
- Express your gratitude for how this person was there for you in your lifetime.
- Create rituals to celebrate the life of the person who died.

Will this pain never end?

Pain sometimes seems to never end. It dulls and increases, and sometimes the grief comes back. It is a difficult journey that many people face, and finding some others who can support you through the journey can be helpful.
**Common Physical Symptoms of Grief:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty falling asleep/nightmares</th>
<th>Fatigue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty staying asleep</td>
<td>Lack of energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early-morning wakening</td>
<td>Unexplained aches and pains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in appetite</td>
<td>Lump in your throat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease in appetite</td>
<td>Slowed movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in weight</td>
<td>Tightness in your chest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nausea</td>
<td>Difficulty breathing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigestion</td>
<td>Restlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headaches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomachaches</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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**Common Emotional Reactions:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mood swings</th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Shock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panic attacks</td>
<td>Disbelief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbness</td>
<td>Tearfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Shame/regret</td>
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**Common Spiritual Reactions:**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Change in belief system</th>
<th>Disconnection from self</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change in values</td>
<td>Change in relationship with God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of hopelessness</td>
<td>Shift in prayer life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in support system</td>
<td>Change in desire to worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning your faith</td>
<td>Shift in priorities-more spiritually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning religious affiliation</td>
<td>focused</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Poems and Quotes:

Don’t be surprised if you grieve more for a friend than you did for a recently deceased relative. The old saying, “You pick your friends, relatives are thrust upon you, holds true here. Friends are special people in our eyes because we hold them to be. Friends fill time in our lives that will be vacant when they die.

-Helen Fitzgerald

Needed:
A strong person wise enough to allow me to grieve in the depth of who I am and strong enough to hear my pain, without turning away.
Not too close because then you couldn’t help me to see.
Not too objective because then you might not care.
Not too aloof because then you could not hug me.
Not too caring because I’d be tempted to let you live my life for me.
I need someone who believes that the sun will rise again.
But who does not fear my darkness or walk through the night,
Someone who can point out the rocks in my way without making me a child by carrying me,
Someone who can stand in the thunder and watch the lightning and believe in a rainbow.

-Father Joe Mahoney

This life is not concerned with health but with healing.
This life is not about our being but our becoming.
This life is not about rest but about exercise.
We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it.
The process is not yet finished but it is going on.
This is not the end but it’s the road.

-Martin Luther
Meditations of the Heart

I share with you the agony of your grief,
The anguish of your heart finds echo in my own.
I know I cannot enter all you feel
Nor bear with you the burden of your pain.
I can but offer what my love does give,
The strength of caring,
The warmth of one who seeks to understand
The silent storm-swept barrenness of so great a loss.
This I do in quiet ways,
That on your lonely path
You may not walk alone.

-Howard Thurman

I need to let you know
That you were not replaceable.
You were one of a kind,
A one-in-a-lifetime friend.
The friendship we had cannot be duplicated.
Indeed, those who audition for my friendship
Will have to measure up
To the standard you set.
A high standard.
But my hunch is that eventually
Someone will happen by
Who has some quality
That will remind me
your irreplacableness
So a new friendship will be formed.
Not a replacement but a new friendship.

-Harold Ivan Smith
“The world loves closure, loves a thing that can, as they say, be gotten though. This is why it comes as a great surprise to find that loss is forever, that two decades after the even there are those occasions when something in you cries out at the continual presence of an absence.”

-Anna Quindlen-

I am richer
For having known you.
The world called memory
Is brighter
By your presence.
Oh some will say
You are gone
But I know-
Know
That you, my friend, are as close as ever.

Your pain still hangs in air;
Sharp notes of if suspended;
The voice of your despair-
That also is not ended.

When near your death a friend
Asked you what he could do,
“Remember me,” you said. We will remember you.

-Thomas Gunn
**Seeking Additional Support May Benefit You if:**

Your grief doesn’t change over time.
Your grief interferes with your ability to function.
You function as though nothing has changed.
Your self-esteem remains at a low level.
Guilt and/or anger overwhelm you.
You withdraw from others.
You think about hurting yourself or someone else.
You have lost your will to live.
You cope with loss through excessive behaviors such as drinking, spending, gambling, food, or computer addictions.
You believe you are depressed.
You have developed destructive and/or risk taking behaviors.
You have recurring flashbacks or nightmares.

**Remember To Take Care Of Yourself:**
- Lie in the sun streaming in through your windows. Bathe in the sun.

- Designate an afternoon or evening and take the phone off the hook, and meditate.

- When you are worried or obsessing, set up a specific time of the day to “worry” for 20 minutes. Set a timer. When the time is up, do something rewarding for yourself.

- Do something you’re good at. It is important to immerse yourself in your skills and abilities, even if the outcome isn’t up to par (trouble concentrating and decreased zest are common in grief).

- Comfort yourself by taking a warm bath using your favorite scents, and burn aromatherapy candles.

- Wrap up in a warm blanket. Put on relaxing music or relaxation tapes and sip your favorite tea or hot chocolate.
Remember To Take Care Of Yourself (continued):

● Play music that matches your mood. Feel understood by the songs and singers that share your experiences.

● Especially when you are feeling stressed and overwhelmed, forget about making to-do lists. Instead, at the close of each day, make a list of what’s been done.

● Find something to care for, such as a garden or a pet.

● Eat nourishing meals each day, even if the food doesn’t hit your taste buds like you’re used to.

● Make a fire in the fireplace and do some stretching and focus on yourself. You can add your favorite soft music to this, if you wish.

● Breathe – really breathe! Take deep breaths in through the nose and slowly out through the mouth.

● Say “No” to something…and “yes” to yourself.

● Try gentle exercise like yoga, tai chi, or walking.

● Spend some time in nature.

● Make a memory box, collage, or journal to store your thoughts and memories.
BOOKS FOR ADULTS WHO ARE GRIEVING A FRIEND:

Grieving the Death of a Friend by Smith, Harold Ivan

When Your Friend Dies by Smith, Harold Ivan

Friendgrief: An Absence Called Presence (Death, Value, and Meaning) by Smith, Harold Ivan

Healing a Friend’s Grieving Heart by Wolfelt, Alan D.

Letters to a Dying Friend: Helping Those You Love Make a Conscious Transition by Grosz, Anton

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS:

On My Honor by Bauer, Marion Dane and Bantam Doubleday Dell, New York 1987 (a friend dies and Joel must deal with the grief) 8-12 years old.

If Nathan Were Here by Bahr, Mary and Eerdmens Books for Young Readers, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000 (remembering the good times when a friend dies) 7-12 years old.


When a Friend Dies: A Book for Teens About Grieving and Healing by Gootman, Marilyn E. and Espeland, Pamela

Dinah Forever by Mills, Claudia, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1995 (when an elderly friend dies, Dinah composes a poem for the funeral) 9-12 years old.
BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS (continued)

Love Ya Like a Sister by Ouriou, Katie and Tundra Books, Toronto, 1999 (this book presents emails, journal entries and letters to friends back home after a teen dies from leukemia) 12 years old and older.

A Taste of Blackberries by Smith, Doris Buchanan and Harper Collins, New York, 1988 (A boy must learn to cope when his daredevil friend, Jamie, dies from an allergic reaction to a bee sting) 8-12 years old.


“We’re all novices in this vacuum called grief, but valued teachers are out there who can offer encouragement from their experiences. That’s why you will read from a wide, diverse group of grievers who have experienced by friendgrief.” – Grieving the Death of a Friend

GENERAL BOOKS ABOUT GRIEVING:
Comfort: A Journey Through Grief by Hood, Ann

This Thing Called Grief: New Understanding of Loss by Ellis, Thomas M.

Grieving: A Beginner’s Guide by McCormack, Jerusha Hull

SUPPORTIVE WEBSITES:
The Bereavement Journey: www.thebereavementjourney.com
Hospice Net: Bereavement www.hospice.net.org/htm/bereavement.html
Bereavement Camps www.kidscamps.com/specialneeds/bereavement.html
Center for Loss & Life Transition www.centerforloss.com
Counseling for Loss and Life Changes, Inc. www.counselingforloss.com
AARP: Grief and Loss www.aarp.org/families/griefloss
GriefNet www.griefnet.org