

Single Parent Networker

Ascension, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit,
Corpus Christi, St. Anne, St. Mary, St. Joseph,
Christ the King, and Spirit of Life

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Emotional Reactions to Loss

For weeks, months, or even years after the death of a loved one occurs, the shock of loss continues in a wave of disbelieving aftershocks. The process is a gradual one of weaning and disconnection. "Forgetting" that your loved one is gone, you may find yourself setting an extra place at the dinner table, expecting your loved one to walk in the door at the usual hour or to be on the other end of the line when the telephone rings. And each time it happens, your confronted once again with the brutal reality. It blunts the impact of the loss, offers you a temporary respite and allows you to process those overwhelming feelings more gradually. On one level you recognize that your loved one has died; on another level you're unable to grasp all the ramifications of that reality.

As the fog of shock and denial begins to lift, you will find yourself headed into the very heart of grief, and you'll become painfully aware of how very much you have lost. An entire gamut of feelings washes over you in overwhelming waves of sorrow. You are flooded with intense, raw feelings of anguish, sadness and fear as you realize that life will never, ever be the same. You may be flooded with questions: Why did this happen to me? How will I be able to go on? How will I be able to face the future without this person? When will I get myself together?

The sorrow of grief saps your energy, making even simple tasks like getting out of bed in the morning, tending to personal grooming, fixing a meal or going somewhere with friends seem overwhelming and exhausting. You may feel negative and critical toward everything and everyone, including yourself. Even in the company of others you may still feel lonely, and may prefer to avoid gatherings of any size.

You may be flooded with bittersweet memories, all the things you would have, could have, or should have said and done, and now will never be able to say or do. You may have difficulty concentrating and remembering, and feel incapable of making the simplest decision. You may experience nightmares, dreams and phobias, and you may fear that you're going crazy.

You may find yourself crying at the slightest provocation or at unexpected moments. On the other hand, you may fear that if you show your sadness, there will be no end to it - that if you permit yourself to cry the tears will never stop. As a child you may have been taught that crying is a sign of weakness, and strong people (especially men) don't cry. If it is the style of some in your family to be strong and silent in front of others, you may have to accept it and allow for it.

Nevertheless, it is far better to let the tears come, and welcome them as a natural and helpful form of release. When you permit yourself to let go for a time and release what you feel, you'll be better able to function afterward. And get rid of the notion that you're crying too much; there is no such thing. It is physically impossible for anyone to cry 24 hours a day. Let others (especially children) see you cry. It shows them that you care deeply, and reassures them that it's all right to express sad feelings in front of others.

You may have a pessimistic belief that things will never get any better, as if life and living are useless. And you may even want to die. Be aware that thoughts of suicide are not unusual when you're grieving. It is difficult for you to imagine life without your loved one, and you may feel a compelling need to join or to be with the person who has died. Nevertheless, there is a vast difference between thinking about suicide and acting upon such thoughts. In grief, thoughts of suicide are usually fleeting and reflect how desperately you want the pain of loss to end.

Suggestions for Coping with Emotional Reactions

⇒ Understand denial serves a normal function, especially in the beginning. It is your

mind's way of protecting you from more pain. Besides, your brain doesn't "get it" because it is loaded with memories of your loved one. Although the person has died, the one you love continues to exist in our memory and in the memory of others.

- ⇒ Know it's normal to ask questions for which you cannot have all the answers. Asking such questions can be the beginning of dealing with loss.
- ⇒ Put yourself on a regular, daily routine, and set goals that are manageable and achievable. Schedule activities you enjoy, knowing you will feel moments of sadness as well pleasure, and accept both sets of feelings without guilt
- ⇒ Resist the urge to be all by yourself. Find someone you can trust who will listen to you.
- ⇒ Try setting aside a certain crying time each day when you can deliberately immerse yourself in grief.
- ⇒ Avoid the use of drugs and alcohol, which may add to your feelings of depression.
- ⇒ Seek professional help if after a reasonable period of time, despite everything you've tried to do, you still feel no relief from these feelings. If you feel you are "coming apart", no longer in control, isolated with no one to turn to; if you are turning to alcohol or drugs to cope with stress; if you feel hopelessly depressed, or you feel suicidal call someone immediately; a friend, clergy person, therapist or counselor, or dial 911.

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Lenten Activities for the Family

Lent begins on Wednesday, March 5. Lent comes from a word that means "springtime," and is celebrated for 40 days before Easter Sunday. Lent is a time of repentance, prayer and sacrifice in preparation for the great feast of Easter. By preparing for Easter as a family we can deepen family, faith and relationships. Try some of these activities with your family.

Lenten Journal:

On Ash Wednesday, make an official beginning to your Lenten season by starting a 40 day journal of what your family will do to celebrate this season. Keep a record of special prayers and activities you do together in this notebook. Children will enjoy decorating it and helping to enter each day's activities.

Letting Them Know:

Write a letter to a teacher, friend, parent, child, or relative to thank them for who they are...tell someone about a quality you admire in him/her...take time to thank someone who "works behind the scenes"...surprise someone in your family at least once a week.

Sacrifice Jar:

Take a vase and put a simple purple ribbon around it with a small crucifix. Beside the vase place a bowl of beans. For every prayer, good deed or any type of sacrifice that is offered, place a bean in the vase. This will symbolize how small Lenten sacrifices add up. On Easter Sunday the beans are replaced by jelly beans or another type of candy to show the sweetness of everlasting life through our sacrifices on earth.



Feast of St. Patrick - March 17

St. Patrick was born around 385. When he was about 14 years of age, he was captured and taken to Ireland to herd and tend sheep. It was during this time of captivity that he turned to God. He eventually escaped and began to study for the priesthood. He was later ordained a bishop. St. Patrick performed many miracles and preached of his love for God. He died in 461, after teaching many people about the Trinity through the use of the shamrock.

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF GRIEF

While loss affects people in different ways, many people experience the following symptoms when they're grieving. Just remember that almost anything that you experience in the early stages of grief is normal – including feeling like you're going crazy, feeling like you're in a bad dream, or questioning your religious beliefs.

- ♥ **Shock and disbelief** – Right after a loss, it can be hard to accept what happened. You may feel numb, have trouble believing that the loss really happened, or even deny the truth. If someone you love has died, you may keep expecting them to show up, even though you know they're gone.
- ♥ **Sadness** – Profound sadness is probably the most universally experienced symptom of grief. You may have feelings of emptiness, despair, yearning, or deep loneliness. You may also cry a lot or feel emotionally unstable.
- ♥ **Guilt** – You may regret or feel guilty about things you did or didn't say or do. You may also feel guilty about certain feelings (e.g. feeling relieved when the person died after a long, difficult illness). After a death, you may even feel guilty for not doing something to prevent the death, even if there was nothing more you could have done.
- ♥ **Anger** – Even if the loss was nobody's fault, you may feel angry and resentful. If you lost a loved one, you may be angry at yourself, God, the doctors, or even the person who died for abandoning you. You may feel the need to blame someone for the injustice that was done to you.
- ♥ **Fear** – A significant loss can trigger a host of worries and fears. You may feel anxious, helpless, or insecure. You may even have panic attacks. The death of a loved one can trigger fears about your own mortality, of facing life without that person, or the responsibilities you now face alone.
- ♥ **Physical symptoms** – We often think of grief as a strictly emotional process, but grief often involves physical problems, including fatigue, nausea, lowered immunity, weight loss or weight gain, aches and pains, and insomnia.

Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal.

– Author Unknown

"The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of confusion or despair, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing...not curing...that is a friend indeed."

– Henri Nouwen

Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul, and sings the tune without the words, and never stops at all.

– Emily Dickinson



Parenting Pointers

562. Mar. 7: With Lent just starting have you discussed with your child(ren) what special efforts everyone in the family might do to enter into Christ's sacrifice during these 40 days? Perhaps everyone could choose one personal sacrifice and the family can agree on one common sacrifice. Telling each other helps keep you accountable.

563. Mar. 14: Whether or not you follow global politics, at any given time there are many countries in which families are torn apart by war. Syria is one that is especially sad as peacemaking efforts are failing. Syrian Christians have asked that we pray for our brothers and sisters like them around the world who share our faith, but not our freedom. Tell your child about a country beyond your own borders.

564. Mar. 21: March 21 is Single Parent Day. If you are a single parent we honor you for the effort you must make to provide continuous care for your child, often without the help of a ready partner. If you are blessed to have a helpmate, reach out to a parent who needs a helping hand this weekend.

565. Mar. 28: Affirming your child for effort and accomplishments is good; but don't mix your "Cs" (compliments with criticisms). "Honey, what a beautiful drawing you did. Next time try to be a little neater." The criticism cancels out the compliment.

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PRAYER OF A SINGLE PARENT

My Lord and Holy Companion, I am alone in the awesome task of making a home.

I ask your help to show me how to take on the responsibilities of both mother and father.

Direct my heart so I may dispense the qualities of gentle compassion on one hand, of firm discipline on the other; may I transmit true tenderness coupled with true strength.

The days are long and the nights lonely, yet, with your divine support the impossible will unfold as possible, and our home will be more than a house.

May the unknown future cast me into deeper trust and love of you, and fill my heart with love.

Amen

Beginning Experience:

Separated, Divorced, Widow
Barbara at 701-226-7719

Level I—Charity Lutheran

Level II—Faith Lutheran

Level III—Good Shepherd

Each level is 10 weeks. All levels run concurrently. See website below.

Children's Beginning Experience:

Susan at 1-701-258-3152

Free Preschool for 3&4 year olds for eligible families, contact **BECEP** at 701-323-4400 for school year.

Caring for Children Program—health coverage to uninsured children. 1-800-342-4718. www.ndcaring.org

Single File Newsletter

For information

www.bismarcksinglefile.com

Parish Information:

Cathedral—222-2259

St. Anne—223-1549

Ascension—223-3606

St. Mary- 223-5562

Corpus Christi—255-4600

Spirit of Life-663-1660

Christ the King -663-8842

St. Joseph -663-9562

Office of Family Ministry—Diocese of Bismarck—

Joyce McDowall 701-222-3035

Toll Free 1-877-405-7435

www.bismarckdiocese.com

jmcdowall@bismarckdiocese.com

If you would like your name removed from the mailing list, please call your parish coordinator

Parents Forever-Education for Families in divorce Transition, call NDSU Parent Resource Center, 667-3342 or 667-3340

WEBSITES THAT MAY BE OF INTEREST:

- www.celebratesimply.com
- www.bereavementmag.com
- www.beginningexperienceofwesternnorthdakota.org
- www.vibrantfaithathome.org
- www.usccb.org

www.fambooks.com/moms.htm

www.singleparents.about.com

www.bridgetobenefits.org