

# The Bereavement Buddy

August 2016

## Mustering the Courage to Mourn

by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

**Whatever you do, you need courage.” –  
Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Loss brings uninvited pain into our lives. In opening to the presence of the pain of your loss, in acknowledging the inevitability of the pain, in being willing to gently embrace the pain, you demonstrate the courage to honor the pain.

Honoring means “recognizing the value of” and “respecting.” It is not instinctive to see grief and the need to openly mourn as something to honor, yet the capacity to love requires the necessity to mourn. To honor your grief is not self-destructive or harmful, it is courageous and life-giving.

The word express literally means “to press or squeeze out, to make known and reveal.” Self-expression can change you and the way you

perceive and experience your world. Transforming your thoughts and feelings into words gives them meaning and shape. Your willingness to honestly affirm your need to mourn will help you survive this difficult time in your life. Your spiritual purpose is not to repress or overindulge your emotions but rather to allow them so fully that they move through you.

The pain of grief will keep trying to get your attention until you unleash your courage to gently, and in small doses, open to its presence. The alternative—denying or suppressing your pain—is in fact more painful. If you do not honor your grief by acknowledging it, it will accumulate and fester. So, you must ask yourself, “How will I host this loss? What do I intend to do with this pain? Will I befriend it, or will I make it my enemy?”

I have learned that the pain that surrounds the closed heart of grief is the pain of living against yourself, the pain of denying how the loss changes you, the pain of feeling alone and

isolated—unable to openly mourn, unable to love and be loved by those around you. Instead of dying while you are alive, you can choose to allow yourself to remain open to the pain, which, in large part, honors the love you feel for the person who has died. After all, love and grief are two sides of the same precious coin.

As an ancient Hebrew sage observed, “If you want life, you must expect suffering.” Paradoxically, it is the very act of mustering the courage to move toward the pain that ultimately leads to healing.

## Take Grief’s Hand

Someone you have given love to and received love from has died. You are grieving. You are “bereaved” which literally means you have been “torn apart” and have “special needs.” You are beginning, or are in the midst of, a journey that is painful, often lonely and naturally frightening.

Among your most special needs right now is to have the courage to grieve and mourn in a culture that doesn’t always invite you to feel safe to do so. That said, I have written this book to help you draw forth your courage—the courage that already exists within you—to accept grief and mourning as they come.

There is a difference between grieving and mourning. Grief is the constellation of internal thoughts and feelings we have when someone we love dies. Mourning is when you take the grief you have on the inside and express it outside yourself. In other words, mourning is grief in action.

I encourage you to take grief’s hand and let it lead you through the darkness and toward the light. You may not see the light at first, but forge ahead with courage, and with the faith that the light of hope and happiness does exist. Feel your pain, sorrow, sadness, disbelief, agony, heartbreak, fear, anxiety, and loneliness as much as you can.

This may seem odd, as these emotions could well be the ones you most want to avoid. You might fall into the common thinking of our society that denying these feelings will make them go away. You might have the urge to “keep your chin up” and stay busy and wait to “get over” your grief. Yet, ironically, the only way to help these hard feelings pass is to wade in the muck of them. To get in, and get dirty. Grief isn’t clean, tidy, or convenient. Yet feeling it and expressing it is the only way to feel whole, once again. Unresolved grief can leave you feeling “stuck” or empty. Your ability to engage in life could be inhibited and you might feel like you’ve shut down.

Instead, choose grief. And as you walk with your grief, actively mourn. Cry when you need to, call a friend when you feel overwhelmed, join a grief support group, express yourself through writing, music, dance, or sports. By taking action, you will eventually integrate the death of your loved one into your life. In exchange, you will find the hope, courage, and desire to once again live a full and rewarding life.

While walking with grief, remember two important things: 1) Grief and mourning have no timeline. Your grief journey is unique and will take as little or as much time as needed, depending on the unique circumstances of your loss. 2) Taking breaks along the way is needed and necessary. I like to use the word “dosing” when referring to grieving and mourning. Grief is not something you can do all at once. Feeling so many feelings often leads to overwhelm. Instead, take in “doses” of grief and mourn in bits and pieces. Retreat and welcome respite as needed.

Grief may never leave your side, but it will allow you to let go and venture forth on your own more and more as days, weeks, months, and years pass. Tap into your innate courage and accept the hand held out by grief.

## Befriend Courage

What is courage? When you think of courage, images of bravery might come to mind—knights on horseback charging the line, firefighters risking their lives to rescue a family from a burning building, or hikers summiting Mount Everest. This is bravery, not courage. Bravery is loud and boisterous. Courage is soft and quiet. Without the steady, quiet resolve and unfailing commitment of courage, bravery would never happen. Courage is what fuels bravery. It is the bridge between fear and action. It is a still, quiet voice encouraging you to go on.

Bravery is daring and doing, courage is friendly and welcoming. Find ways to make friends with courage. To “befriend” literally means making an effort to “become friends.” Imagine what it would be like to have courage as a friend who walks beside you at all times; a friend who never nags, never pushes, but simply places a gentle hand on your back and whispers words of encouragement, helping you take the next step, and the next. With courage by your side, you are able to go on, to walk through your days and do the next right thing.

Cultivate a relationship with courage every day. Each morning, welcome courage. Before you rise, say your favorite quote on courage out loud. Maybe it is the Serenity Prayer, borrowed from Alcoholics Anonymous, and one of my favorites: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” Or maybe there’s another that you especially like. If you want, write down your favorite quotes on courage and put them on your fridge, dashboard, mirror or computer at work. This will help you keep courage close, all day long.

Look for simple ways to give voice to courage throughout the day. Maybe it is simply having the gumption to get out of bed. But maybe it’s the courage to share how you feel about your loss with a coworker or friend, or to walk through the

doors of a grief support group. It could simply be making a phone call you’ve been putting off, writing a thank you to someone who helped after the funeral, going to church alone, or finding the backbone to be honest with yourself about something you fear. Healing after a death is hard. It takes courage in all shapes and sizes to mourn fully while living day to day. Congratulate yourself on welcoming courage, regardless of its size or reach.

### About the Author

Dr. Alan Wolfelt is a respected author and educator on the topic of healing in grief. He serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and is on the faculty at the University of Colorado Medical School’s Department of Family Medicine. Dr. Wolfelt has written many compassionate, bestselling books designed to help people mourn well so they can continue to love and live well, including *Understanding Your Grief*, *The Mourner’s Book of Hope*, and *The Mourner’s Book of Courage*, from which this article was excerpted. Visit [www.centerforloss.com](http://www.centerforloss.com) to learn more about the natural and necessary process of grief and mourning and to order Dr. Wolfelt’s books.



# Grief Muster

## Mustering the Courage to Grieve

*"Whatever you do, you need courage"*

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

The pain of grief will keep trying to get your attention until you unleash your courage to gently open to its presence. The alternative, denying or suppressing your pain, is in fact more painful. The experience of grief can often be a lonely isolating, frightening place to be. Mustering the courage to move forward in the pain ultimately leads to healing.

Every year in August the NALAG Centre for Loss and Grief holds various events for Grief Awareness Month. The Grief Awareness Month theme for 2016 is "Mustering the Courage to Grieve". NALAG is encouraging participation in a "mustering" or gathering of people to express their grief in ways that are meaningful to them.

There are many ways to encourage a coming together for support and remembering loved ones who have died.

By participating in a "Grief Muster" people gather to

reflect and remember we are acknowledging grief and promoting resilience. So encourage your community, church group, clients, and friends to engage in this event. At the NALAG Centre in Dubbo we will hold a short remembering ceremony followed by light refreshments. You could enhance awareness at the Grief Muster by wearing a particular colour or T-Shirt and carrying a balloon.

Loss can include many things including the death of a loved one, divorce and separation, miscarriage, infertility, abortion, unemployment, retirement, loss of a pet, disability or serious illness.

This year we are holding 3 key events.

1. "Grief Muster - Remembering Ceremony" - a gathering of the community in solidarity, support and remembrance.
2. Photography Treasure Hunt and
3. Photo and Art Exhibition.

For more information on each event see our website [www.nalag.org.au](http://www.nalag.org.au)

### Grief Muster Remembering Ceremony

**Date:** Saturday 13th August 2016

**Time:** 11.00AM

**Where:** NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief, Welchman Street, Dubbo

### Photo Treasure Hunt

**Date:** Saturday 20th August 2016

**Time:** 10.00AM

**Where:** Fire Station Arts Centre, Darling Street, Dubbo

### Art & Photo Exhibition

**Date:** Saturday 20th August 2016

**Time:** 6.00PM

**Where:** Fire Station Arts Centre  
Darling Street, Dubbo

## Grief Muster



**When:** Saturday 13th August 2016

**Time:** 11.00AM

**Cost:** FREE

**RSVP:** Ph: 02 6882 9222

E: [info@nalag.org.au](mailto:info@nalag.org.au)

### What is it?

A "muster" or gathering of people to acknowledge loss, grief and resilience.

We will meet at the NALAG Centre for Loss and Grief in Welchman Street, Dubbo at 11.00am for a short Remembering Ceremony followed by light refreshments.

All members of the community are invited to attend this event. If you have experienced a recent loss in your workplace/school or church group - maybe organise a group of your colleagues/friends to attend and wear a certain colour, flower or bring balloons.

This event is really what YOU make it. It is a commemoration and recognition of significant losses.



## Photo Treasure Hunt

**When:** Saturday 20th August 2016

**Time:** 10.00 AM

**Cost:** FREE

### What is it?

Your chance to get your camera or smart phone out and take photos in your community to promote awareness of loss, grief, hope and resilience.

### How does it work?

#### Start

10.00 am - Drop into the Fire Station Arts Centre (Darling Street, Dubbo) to receive your mission for the Photo Treasure Hunt. You will be given 4 themes - you will need to take one photo for each theme.

#### End

1.00 pm - drop back to the Fire State Arts Centre and download your photos or email them to [phototreasure@nalag.org](mailto:phototreasure@nalag.org).

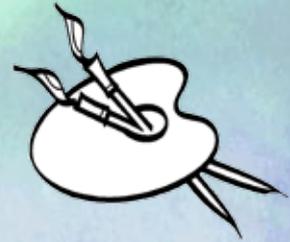
### Photo Exhibition

6.00pm - Your photos will be printed and displayed in our pop up gallery. Join us for canapes and drinks. Awards for best individual themes and an overall winner will be presented at 7.00 pm together with a lucky door prize.

Winning entries will be printed in the Weekender and may feature on the front cover of the NALAGNews.

This is a **FREE** community event open to all ages.

## Art & Photo Exhibition



**When:** Saturday 20th August 2016

**Time:** 6.00 pm

**Cost:** FREE

### What is it?

Your chance to see the art works created and photos taken in your community to promote awareness of loss, grief, hope and resilience.

### Art Submissions

We are calling for all art submissions to be presented the NALAG Centre for Loss and Grief in Welchman Street by COB Thursday 18th August 2016.

### What can be submitted?

Art of any kind - paintings, drawings, photography, sculpture and fabric/material art (inc cross-stitch etc).

# From the Manager

## NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief



**Trudy Hanson OAM**  
*Grief Counsellor & Educator  
Manager, NALAG Centre for  
Loss & Grief, Dubbo*

Hello Everyone and welcome to this issue of the Bereavement Buddy.

We have been super busy here at the NALAG Centre in Dubbo preparing for workshops, Seasons for Healing (small group program supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults with issues of loss and grief), Seasons for Growth children program has just been completed with 15 children attending in 3 age groups. The Centre has been a flurry of activity each Thursday afternoon as they all arrive enthusiastic to meet new friends and see their Seasons Companion. This term our groups were accompanied by Ruth, Virginia Liz and Libby. A big thank you to Debbie our volunteer who has also helped out with Seasons preparation and organising.

The Centre held Loss & Grief First Aid for new volunteers and local Dubbo attendees. Beate Steller facilitated the workshop and will facilitate the same workshop in Mudgee. Beate's workshops are always well received and popular with attendees.

A new presenter Gabrielle Gwane-Kellar Facilitated an Introduction to Working with Groups Loss & Grief in Dubbo for 22 participants. Attendees who were made up of NALAG volunteers and others from local agencies gave excellent evaluations on her workshop. I look forward to working with Gabrielle on other projects and workshops for NALAG in the future.

Myself and Ruth Gobbitt from Mudgee have been to Bourke to present Seasons for Healing for the community.

The Centre is gearing up for Grief Awareness Month and planning is underway for 3 events in Dubbo and the Mudgee Centre is preparing for events in their town to promote Grief Awareness month.

One event is our Photo Treasure Hunt. We held this event for the first time last year and it was well received by the community. Everyone has a smart phone or a camera that are able to take meaningful photos - photos really are a valuable tool for those experiencing grief. It narrows your focus and lets you reflect and express yourself in a unique way. Here are a few of the photos entered in last years competition. If you would like more information on the Photo Hunt - see our website.

NALAG NSW has been granted 3 years funding which will commence 1/7/16 we look forward to growing and expanding our activities in NSW. If you would like a Branch in your area please contact me for more information.

## Trudy



Photo Credit: David Lennox



Photo Credit: Kerry-Lyn Strain



Photo Credit:



Photo Credit: Lauren Vaughan



Photo Credit: Kerry-Lyn Strain



Photo Credit: Jess Pease



Photo Credit: Leticia Quince

## NALAG (NSW) Inc

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Julie Dunsmore AM MAPS Psychologist

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National Association for Loss & Grief (NSW) Inc

# For Your Diary

## Education & Training

### Blue Healers Depression, Stress and Anxiety Program - 8 Week Program

Dubbo - Wednesday Nights Starting 27th July at 6.00pm

The Blue Healers Program assists people who are experiencing depression, anxiety and stress by teaching participants coping strategies to enhance wellbeing.

Blue Healers is a group program developed and presented by the NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Dubbo. The program is presented by trained facilitators and supervised by a psychologist. The Blue Healers Program is offered FREE of charge to suitable participants. A light supper will be provided.

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### Understanding the Grieving Process Through Myth and Metaphor

Half Day Workshop - Bellingen

Friday 5 August 2016

CWA Hall 21 Elizabeth Street Sawtell  
9.15am for a 9.30am start - 12.30pm

Cost \$20.00 Morning tea provided

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### Seasons for Growth Companion Training - Children and Young People's Program 2 Day Workshop

DUBBO - Friday 26th August and Saturday 27th August 2016

Seasons for Growth is an innovative education program for children and young people in Primary and Secondary schools which explores the effects of change, loss and grief.

Facilitated by trained Companions within small 'peer' groups, the participants explore feelings, memories, loss and grief in a safe and creative way.

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### Aboriginal Healing Workshop Facilitator Training

**When:** Thursday, 6 October

**Time:** 9.30am - 4.30pm

**Where:** NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief  
Welchman Street,  
Dubbo NSW

**Cost:** \$280.00

## Events

### Grief Awareness Month

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For more information on any of these events please call the NALAG Centre in Dubbo on 02 6882 9222 or see our website.

#### Bookings & Enquiries

NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Dubbo

Ph: 02 6882 9222

E: [education@nalag.org.au](mailto:education@nalag.org.au)

W: [www.nalag.org.au](http://www.nalag.org.au) for more information.

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