

The Bereavement Buddy

June 2015

A Different Grief - A Man's Grief

Each year we acknowledge Mens Health Week during June, in this Issue of the Bereavement Buddy we look at men's grief as a health issue.

By Deatra Yatman, MSW, LCSW

Everyone goes through a natural grieving process when a death occurs. We each behave and express feelings according to the way we've been taught and as modeled by our society, our culture, our family, our peers and other influences. A belief system is created that affects the way that we perceive life, death and grief.

Although men and women both feel pain and grieve when they suffer a loss, the way they deal with grief is where the differences in their grieving become apparent. The differences we see in "his" and "her"



grief responses are due to our different styles of coping with pain and loss.

There are many factors that cause these differences in coping... and most often we were carefully "taught."

From childhood, we are taught different gender roles. Little girls are taught and encouraged to share feelings, express needs and receive support from others. This support system is acquired over a lifetime.

Boys are treated quite differently and are often told, "Big boys don't cry," and "You have to be strong." Men often have minimal social support systems outside of the immediate family and will often say that their wife is their best friend. She is the one with whom he shares his thoughts and feelings.

In our society, men are disproportionately unprepared to express distressed feelings and loneliness because of the way they are expected to behave and cope. Men are "expected" to be strong, to deal

with problems, to be assertive (and sometimes aggressive), to take charge, to accomplish tasks, to achieve goals, to bear pain, be able to fix things (not just mechanical!), to be sexually potent, to endure stress without giving up or giving in and to care for, protect and support his family. Whew! It is no wonder that men are reluctant, and often cautious, to express the painful emotions of grief after the death of a loved one and choose instead to “go it alone” or reconnect quickly with a new partner.

Men are often isolated during grief and loss, with no one to talk to about their feelings. When societal messages about men being strong come into play, a grieving male may repress emotions so as not to appear weak or vulnerable. They are “expected” to be self-sufficient and independent, able to rely on their own strength. They are expected to accept difficulties with a certain non-emotional response. They are expected to “take things like a man,” which means “don’t show us your tears or your weaknesses.” When men lose a loved one, they often isolate to protect themselves and to avoid feeling embarrassed by overwhelming emotions.

In times of loss and grief, a man may be unable to express feelings because of a fear that he may “break down” and be viewed as weak and impotent. At the same time men may need support the most but they were trained not to reach out for it. They see their loss as something they must endure alone because they have been taught to be self-sufficient. Often men feel the need to “disconnect” even more in order to handle the intensity of the emotions they feel alone, where no one will see them or judge them. It is difficult (and often perceived as unacceptable) for a man to feel helpless and out of control.

Because men are expected to be the “strong ones” they are less likely to talk about, cry about, share thoughts about the loss or seek outside support. Men may use aggression, anger or violence, a new love relationship and substance abuse as grief substitutes (just to name a few). They may find ways to handle upsetting feelings without disclosing them to others, such as: going to the cemetery alone (to engage in solitary mourning); taking physical or legal action; or becoming immersed in activity, a new relationship or possibly even exhibiting addictive behavior(s).

While these demanding and unrealistic expectations may make daily survival possible for men, they make the successful resolution of a loss very difficult and, in many cases, impossible.

There are helpful and concrete ways to show support to a man in grief:

- **Acknowledge the death:** It’s important for

expressions of sympathy to be honest and heartfelt. Acknowledge his pain without expecting a response about feelings

- **Express genuine interest in feelings, concerns and conditions of loss:** Accept the survivor’s expressions which are reflections of conflict and mixed emotions.
- **Be a safe place:** Hold the griever’s sharing in confidentiality; otherwise, it’s not safe to share. Be willing to say, “I can assure you that this will remain between the two of us.”
- **Accept and encourage tears:** When a man is struggling to hold back tears, he may be relieved to hear a quiet, “You don’t have to keep it in. It’s okay to feel.”
- **Share silence:** Sometimes much is said in silence, nonverbally. Silence builds trust. Sometimes a simple nod, a touch, a pat or certain look conveys everything the other person needs to know.
- **Perform incidental acts of compassion:** Be willing to help. Don’t ask what he needs. Ask if you can help with a particular task. Taking over a task quietly and efficiently can be effective.

Keep in mind that male gender conditioning acts strongly and in direct opposition to the requirements necessary to grieve a loss successfully. The majority of men react to the death of a loved one by keeping their thoughts and emotional pain to themselves; not saying anything helps protect against vulnerability, and silence is socially encouraged in American culture.

Due to the lack of support and outlets for expression of their grief, men are more at risk for illness and death than women after a significant loss of a loved one. When we offer support to the bereaved man, try to keep in mind that just because he doesn’t react the way you think he should doesn’t mean that he isn’t grieving or hurting; it just means that he has his own way of doing it. You can be most helpful by being sensitive to this difference when you show up to walk beside him during a most painful journey and transition.

Source: <http://hopegroups.org/a-different-grief-a-mans-grief/>

Helping a Man Who is Grieving

by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

A man you care about is grieving. Someone he loved has died and you would like to help him during this difficult time. This brochure will help you know what to do and say as you offer your love and companionship to your friend.

Men feel the need to be strong.

Even in the face of tragic loss, many men in our society still feel the need to be self-contained, stoic and to express little or no outward emotion. It is very much in vogue today to encourage men to openly express their feelings, but in practice few men do so. The outward expression of grief is called mourning. All men grieve when someone they love dies, but if they are to heal, they must also mourn.

You can help by offering a “safe place” for your friend to mourn. Tell him you’d like to help. Offer to listen whenever he wants to talk. Don’t worry so much about what you will say. Just concentrate on the words that are being shared with you. Let him know that in your presence at least, it’s OK for him to express whatever feelings he might have—sadness, anger, guilt, fear. Around you, he doesn’t have to be strong because you will offer support without judgment.

Men feel the need to be active.

The grief experience naturally creates a turning inward and slowing down on the part of the mourner, a temporary self-focus that is vital to the ultimate healing process. Yet for many men this is threatening. Masculinity is equated with striving, moving and activity. Many grieving men throw themselves into their work in an attempt to distract themselves from their painful feelings.

Maybe you can offer your friend both activity and time for reflection. Ask him to shoot hoops or play golf. Go for a hike or fishing with your friend. Let him know that you really want to hear how he’s doing, how he’s feeling. In the context of these activities he just might share some of his innermost thoughts.

Active problem-solving is another common male response to grief. If a father’s child dies of SIDS, for example, the father may become actively involved in fundraising for SIDS research. A husband whose

wife is killed may focus on the legal circumstances surrounding the death. Such activities can be healing for grieving men and should be encouraged.

Men feel the need to be protectors.

Men are generally thought of as the “protectors” of the family. They typically work to provide their spouses and children with a warm, safe home, safe transportation and good medical care. So when a member of his family dies, the “man of the house” may feel guilty. No matter how out of his control the death was, the man may feel deep down that he has failed at protecting the people in his care.

If your friend expresses such thoughts, you will probably feel the need to reassure him that the death was not his fault. Actually, you may help your friend more by just listening and trying to understand. By allowing him to talk about his feelings of failure, you are helping him to work through these feelings in his own way and his own time.

It’s OK for men to grieve differently.

We’ve said that men feel the need to be strong and active in the face of grief. Such responses are OK as long as your friend isn’t avoiding his feelings altogether. It’s also OK for men to feel and express rage, to be more cognitive or analytical about the death, to not cry. All of these typically masculine responses to grief may help your friend heal; there is no one “right” way to mourn a death.

Avoid clichés.

Sometimes words, particularly clichés, can be extremely painful for mourners. Clichés are trite comments often intended to provide simple solutions to difficult realities. Men are often told “You’ll get over this” or “Don’t worry, you and Susie (can) have another child” or “Think about the good times.” Comments like these are not constructive. Instead, they hurt because they diminish a very real and very painful loss.

Make contact.

Your presence at the funeral is important. As a ritual, the funeral provides an opportunity for you to express your love and concern at this time of need. As you pay tribute to a life that is now passed, you have a chance to support your grieving friend. At the funeral, a touch of your hand, a look in your eye or even a hug communicates more than words could ever say.

But don’t just attend the funeral then disappear. Remain available afterwards as well. Grief is a process, and it may take your friend years to reconcile himself to his new life. Remember that your

grieving friend may need you more in the weeks and months after the funeral than at the time of the death.

Be aware of holidays and other significant days.

Your friend may have a difficult time during special occasions like holidays and other significant days, such as the birthday of the person who died and the anniversary of the death. These events emphasize the person's absence. Respect this pain as a natural extension of the grief process.

These are appropriate times to visit your friend or write a note or simply give him a quick phone call. Your ongoing support will be appreciated and healing.

Watch for warning signs.

Men who deny and repress their real feelings of grief may suffer serious long-term problems. Among these are:

- chronic depression, withdrawal and low self-esteem
- deterioration in relationships with friends and family
- physical complaints such as headaches, fatigue and backaches chronic anxiety, agitation and restlessness
- chemical abuse or dependence
- indifference toward others, insensitivity and workaholism

If you see any of these symptoms in your friend, talk to him about your concern. Find helping resources for him in his community, such as support groups and grief counselors. You can't force your friend to seek help but you can make it easier for him to seek help.

Understand the importance of the loss.

Always remember that the death of someone loved is a shattering experience. As a result of this death, your friend's life is under reconstruction. Consider the significance of the loss and be compassionate and available in the weeks and months to come.

"Helping a friend in grief is a difficult task. Helping a man in grief can be especially difficult, so few friends follow through in their desire to help. I encourage you to stand by your friend during this painful time. Your ongoing presence, patience and support will help him more than you will ever know."

About the Author

Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt is a noted author, educator and practicing grief counselor. He serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado and presents dozens of grief-related workshops each year across North America. Among his books are *Healing Your Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas* and *The Healing Your Grieving Heart Journal for Teens*. For more information, write or call The Center for Loss and Life Transition, 3735 Broken Bow Road, Fort Collins, Colorado 80526, (970) 226-6050 or visit their website, www.centerforloss.com.

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From the Manager

NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief



Welcome to this issue of Bereavement Buddy and the topic of men and grief.

Current scientific research on the brain indicates that men functionally differently from women. These distinctions account for the many differences between how men and women process information and the feelings they may have - coping with grief and loss are no exception.

While men and women experience grief the same, they will likely process and express it in very different ways, there are many of examples of men's grief work at our Centre in Dubbo.

This edition of the Bereavement Buddy should be a valuable resource for those supporting men who are grieving.

Remember that if you or someone you know is grieving, support is available you dont have to go it alone. Please call our Centre in Dubbo on 02 6882 9222 for more information and referral to a NALAG Centre or Branch near you.

Regards



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

NALAG (NSW) Inc

NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Dubbo
MANAGER Trudy Hanson OAM

Head Office
Welchman Street, Dubbo NSW 2830

All Mail
PO Box 379, Dubbo NSW 2830
Phone: 02 6882 9222
Fax: 02 6884 9100
Email: info@nalag.org.au
Website: www.nalag.org.au

Design: Paula Hanson

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The Art of Healing

Acknowledging Loss - Promoting Community Resilience



Grief Awareness Month August 2015

Artists have used their art to express human emotional for centuries. This year for Grief Awareness Month we explore the use of art as a healing process for grief. This may be paint, drawing, sculpture, pottery, quilting, photography or even dance/movement.

Art is for everyone! Each of us possesses our own special talents and creative gifts - it's time to explore them.

How can art help with Grief?

Creative arts can help you express emotions that are very hard to put into words. Art allows you to express extreme emotions of anger and pain in a safe manner. The creation of art can also relieve the symptoms of depression, stress and anxiety.

How do I get started?

It's as easy as picking up a pen or pencil and getting started. You could write a poem, short story or draw. Explore colour with paints. If you like taking photos, start taking pictures with your smart phone.

For more information contact NALAG

PH: 02 6882 9222 **E:** info@nalag.org.au

Web: www.nalag.org.au

What's On

Grandpa's Hat Book Launch

Saturday August 1

Lazy River Estate - 6.00pm
\$50 per person
\$19.95 Book

Photo Treasure Hunt

Saturday August 29

Starts 10am

FREE

Prizes to be won

Wattle Tree

During the month of August NALAG will be taking our wattle tree throughout the community and asking you to place your fingerprint on the tree in a symbol of community solidarity in times of grief. This is a FREE event.

NALAG
Centre for Loss & Grief

Grandpa's Hat Book Launch

The NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief is proud to announce the release and launch of its very own Children's Book **Grandpa's Hat**.

The talented journalist Jen Cowley has authored a children's book on grief reflecting her own journey. The book will be launched on the 1st of August in Dubbo. August is Grief Awareness Month Australia wide.

A message from Jen Cowley:

It's been five years in the making, but the universe told me it was time to do something about this humble little book that has been quietly sitting buried in my computer since the wonderful team at NALAG suggested that as part of my healing process, I pen something as a tribute to my much loved big brother, Rossco - who died in 2009, and who had shared my childhood experiences of significant loss during the 70s and 80s, when children were largely isolated from the process of grieving - something adults still tend to do, thinking we're protecting our kids.

When the beautiful George Cowley (my sister in law) died in February, leaving two precious little girls (to whom Grandpa's Hat is dedicated) I knew it was the perfect time to bring the project to life as a resource for NALAG - the National Association for Loss and Grief - and for parents and carers to help guide children through the difficult process of grieving, and to have a clear and honest conversation about death and dying.



With the incredibly generous support of the combined Rotary Clubs of Dubbo and Coonabarabran, this project will help raised much needed funds for NALAG - all proceeds from the book, the launch and the auction of Mark Horton's superb watercolour illustrations will support the work of NALAG (a locally based, not-for-profit organisation that struggles for

ongoing funding, despite the incredibly important work they do).

*Please consider coming along to the launch if you can, buy a book if you can't or donate if you feel so inclined.
Jen*

Tickets are available to attend the book launch, pre order a copy of the book or make a donation.

To purchase tickets or the book please visit our website www.nalag.org.au.

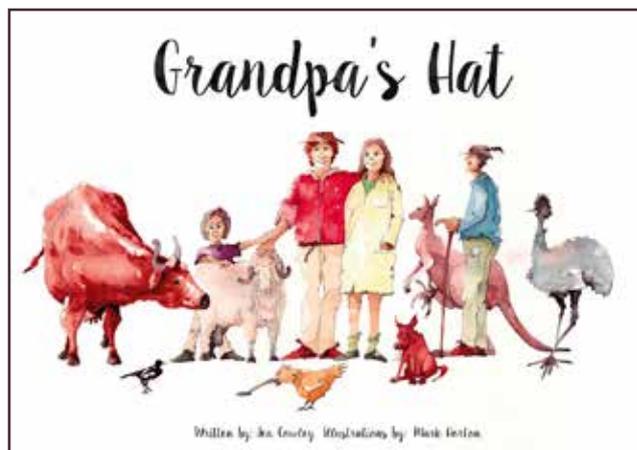


Photo Treasure Hunt

SATURDAY AUGUST 29

Acknowledging Loss - Promoting Community Resilience

A NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Community Art Project
Grief Awareness Month August 2015

For Your Diary

Education & Training

Trauma Informed Care Why & How? 1 Day Workshop

Location: North Sydney
Date: Monday 1st June 2015

Trauma Informed Care Why & How? 1 Day Workshop

Location: Coffs Harbour
Date: Thursday 3th July 2015

Trauma Informed Approach Family & Domestic Violence 2 Day Workshop

Location: Orange
Date: Monday 27th & Tuesday 28th July 2015

Register for a Workshop

Online Registration

Online using your credit card or PayPal Account or alternatively opt to pay by cheque or request an invoice.

Early Bird Online Specials

Register and pay online using your credit card by the specified date and receive the discounted rate for any NALAG (NSW) Inc education and training.

Visit www.nalag.org.au for more information.

Bookings & Enquiries

NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Dubbo
Ph: 02 6882 9222
E: education@nalag.org.au

Events

@ the
NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Dubbo
Welchman St, Dubbo

Mates of NALAG Morning Tea

The Mates of NALAG Morning Teas are held on the 1st Tuesday of each month at 10.00am. A mens group of friends of NALAG, this is an opportunity for anyone with a connection to NALAG or in need of friendship to come to the Centre and catch up over a tea or coffee.

Tea and Talk

The Tea and Talk group is a ladies only morning tea, held every 2nd Wednesday at the NALAG Centre in Dubbo.

@ the
NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Mudgee
107 Mortimer Street, Mudgee

FOR - Families of Residents

FOR (Family of RESidents) is a support group for spouses, children and friends of those living in Residential Care Facilities. Held at 2.00pm on the 1st Thursday of each month at the NALAG Centre in Mudgee.

Mind Yourself

Mind Yourself is a peer support group for those working the care industry. Created to provide health workers, allied health workers, nurses, care staff, case workers etc, with a friendly caring environment where they can discuss personal issues with confidence and confidentiality.

Held at 5.00pm 1st Thursday of each month at the NALAG Centre in Mudgee.

Yarning Group

The Yarning Group is for people who like to work with yarn (knitting, crochet etc) or for people who like a yarn (chut chat, natter etc) to come to gether in friendship and companionship.

Held at 10.00am each 3rd Tuesday each month at the NALAG Centre in Mudgee.

For more information on any of these events please call the NALAG Centre in Dubbo on 02 6882 9222 or NALAG Centre in Mudgee on 0488 255 710.

Join Our Mailing List

Keep up to date with education and training on offer and we will also send you copies of The Bereavement Buddy each month. **Join Now!**