



Survivors Helping Survivors

WILL I FEEL THIS WAY FOREVER?

by Robert Thompswon, MD, Zumbrota, MN

Linda Moffatt of St. Louis, Missouri wrote a very powerful article titled *Will I Feel This Way Forever?* She describes a friend who “cries all the time, doesn’t care about her appearance, drags herself out of bed in the morning to go to work, and doesn’t feel thankful for her children.” Ms. Moffatt goes on, “What this woman is experiencing is normal – it feels horrible, but it is normal.” And the friend asks, “Will I feel this way forever?” The answer is, “No.”

Those among us who are asked to bear the unbearable, need to be reassured by those who have trod this path, that what we are feeling is normal and that we will “get better” but the words “I am over it” will never be on our lips. What can we do in the meantime? How can we get through each day? Others have said we must live an entire calendar year before we even begin to feel better.

There are many feelings and thoughts about the death of a loved one entering our minds. We somehow have to integrate these thoughts and feelings into our daily lives and begin to function on several important levels – our job, perhaps as a parent to our other children, as a spouse, friend, neighbor or sibling. We talk about the mind, body and spirit as if they were three separate entities but nowhere is it more apparent that all of these elements are integrated into one than during that first year of grief. As we experience mental chaos, physical symptoms and often illness, as well as walk in a spiritual wasteland, we need some tools to get us to the other side. Here are some more practical suggestions that may be helpful to sustain us during that first year and perhaps beyond.

Exercise: Avoid the temptation to stay in bed or lie on the couch. Do something physical each day. Force yourself to get up, get dressed and do something. Walk, run, chop wood, clean the house, or go to an exercise center – it doesn’t really matter. Exercise stimulates endorphins and other neurochemicals which help with the physical and mental fatigue.

Do something social each day: It’s important not to isolate yourself from others. Try to visit with a friend or family member each day even if it’s only a phone call or a brief personal encounter. Allow at least one other person to give you a shoulder to lean on. A true friend will welcome the chance to help. When someone asks, “What can I do to help?” – tell them! Let them get groceries, wash the car, clean your house or take the dog to the vet.

Overlook non-helpful remarks: It’s easy to be hurt by unkind things people say, but remember when someone asks you a question or makes a comment about your loss they are almost always trying to be helpful. I once made a list of comments that the well-intentioned offered that were unhelpful. The list was quite long and I finally realized that most people are very uneasy trying to comfort the bereaved, and they frequently say things that don’t come across very well or they fail to say the right thing and say nothing at all. Consider these folks well-intentioned and don’t let anger toward them become the focus of your grief.

Other relationships: Although it may be hard, don’t neglect other relationships, especially those with family members. Your grief is unique and yours alone, other family members are hurting for you and with you. Grandparents, for example, are grieving for both you (their child) and their grandchild. Other children you may have (siblings of the deceased child) are especially in need of attention and counseling. Be aware that your spouse may be handling the death of your child differently than you are.

Cont. on page 2



IN THIS ISSUE

Mental Health America says *Live Your Life Well!*2

For That I am Thankful.....2

Turning loss into living again3

Support groups3

Survivors Helping Survivors would like to hear your story3

Thank you, Susan4

Consider a tax deductible donation.....4

FOREVER?

Cont. from Cover

Make allowances for these differences and give each other space when it's needed.

Don't engage in self-destructive behavior: Don't act out in your pain in negative or self-destructive ways. Using alcohol or drugs to numb your pain has long term consequences that prolong rather than shorten your painful feelings. Likewise, anger directed inappropriately needs to be understood and sorted out, probably in a grief group or with a counselor.

Allow yourself to feel the sadness: We can run but we can't hide from our grief. It will find us and have its way with us. The sadness that crushes us is not optional; what we do with the sadness is up to us. Diverting energy into work or projects as many have done is effective for some people but not for most of us. Feeling the weight of our child's death is exhausting and draining but we must meet it head on and let it wash over us as a cleansing rain to our spirits. Talk and think about your loss often. Share stories and memories and don't worry about the tears when they come. The tears will come and when they are done pouring out, they will stop only to return less often but at unexpected moments.

Don't put a timeline on your grief: As others have said, "It takes as long as it takes." Your sadness is yours and no one else's. Don't put an arbitrary timeline on how long you feel bad and don't compare your grief with someone else's.

These are only suggestions based on what has helped others and me. They may not all work for you. As a friend told me, "everything helps a little, nothing helps a lot." No one or no thing can take away the hurt you are feeling nor would you want to take it away entirely. For without the pain there would be no memories and memories are the link we have with our dead children. Memories are how we keep them with us always. When the darkest hours come, remember that you won't feel this way forever.

MENTAL HEALTH AMERICA SAYS LIVE YOUR LIFE WELL!



During these difficult times, Mental Health America wants you to know that there are tools that can buffer the effects of stress and help them cope better with the many challenges they face. This May, in honor of Mental Health Month, Mental Health America of Wisconsin's national office is launching the *Live Your Life Well* campaign to provide people with 10 specific, research-based tools that can combat stress and promote health and well-being.

From relaxation techniques to journaling exercises to simple ways to get better sleep and improve eating habits, the materials offer a wide range of resources to build resiliency and well-being. The newly developed *Live Your Life Well* web site includes information on seeking the help of a mental health professional, fact sheets with information to help your family cope during these tough economic times, in addition to fact sheets on stress, depression and staying well when you have a mental health condition. You can also take the "How Stressed Are You?" quiz.

For information, visit our web site at www.mhawisconsin.org. We will have a direct link to the *Live Your Life Well* web site. If you're interested brochures or fact sheets directly related to this program, please contact us at info@mhawisconsin.org, or (414) 276-3122.

For additional brochures and fact sheets on stress, depression, personality disorders, PTSD, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorders and more, visit the publications section of our web site.

The 10 Tools to Living Your Life Well

1. Connect with others
2. Stay positive
3. Get physically active
4. Help others
5. Get enough sleep
6. Create joy and satisfaction
7. Eat well
8. Take care of your spirit
9. Deal better with hard times
10. Get professional help if you need it

FOR THAT I AM THANKFUL

By Darcie Sims

It doesn't seem to get any better, but it doesn't get any worse either. For that I am thankful.

There are no more pictures to be taken, but there are memories to be cherished. For that I am thankful.

There is a missing chair at the table, but the circle of family gathers close. For that, I am thankful.

The days are shorter, but the nights are softer, for that I am thankful.

The pain is still there, but it lasts only moments, for that I am thankful.

The calendar still turns, but I am still here. For that I am thankful.

The room is still empty, the soul still aches, but the heart remembers. For that I am thankful.

The guests still come, the dishes pile up, but the dishwasher works. For that I am thankful.

The snow still falls, the sled still waits and the spirit still wants to. For that, I am thankful.

The stillness remains, but the sadness is smaller. For that I am thankful.

The moment is gone, but the love is forever. For that I am blessed. For that, I am grateful.

Love was once (and still is) a part of my being. For that, I am living.

I am living. And for that, I am thankful.

Source: Darcie Sims, Ph.D.,
www.griefinc.com

TURNING LOSS INTO LIVING AGAIN

After facing the devastating grief of losing a loved one to suicide, enjoyment is a skill that can be learned. After such a great loss, we are often uncomfortable with happiness. Then, when we stumble onto it, it frightens us. We need to approach it with caution. But we can work on it and become comfortable with joy in our lives.

For example, take a few minutes each day and jot down in a notebook a list of three things you've done that you feel good about. These may be things you thought you couldn't do, or difficult tasks you had to force yourself to do, or just spontaneous acts of generosity. After a week, look through the notebook at all the things you can feel good about. Never mind all the thoughts about why it's difficult for you to feel good; just ride out the discomfort for a few minutes. You'll see that the uneasiness soon recedes a little. With practice, before long you may start feeling pretty good about yourself. This is the joy of life returning.

Find opportunities for activities that are a mild challenge, that occupy your mind and body, that require a high degree of concentration, that have clear rules and prompt feedback. Practice concentration, making a deliberate effort to focus your attention on the task at hand. Forget yourself, lose the observing eye that is always evaluating you critically. Even at work, even if you dislike your job, you will like yourself better if you find ways to make it challenging and stimulating.

Learn to relax. Take care of your body and learn to listen to it. Eat healthy but delicious meals. Unless we treat ourselves with care respect, we can't hope for joy. But we can find joy through perseverance.

Source: Undoing Depression, Richard O'Connor

SURVIVORS HELPING SURVIVORS SUPPORT GROUPS

It can be so powerful to connect with other survivors. And such a relief to be able to talk openly about suicide with people who really understand.

For so many survivors, a crucial part of their healing process is the support and sense of connection they feel through sharing their grief with other survivors. The most common way this sharing occurs is through survivor support groups. These groups provide a safe place where survivors can share their experiences and support each other.

It is natural to feel a bit unsure about going to your first support group meeting. Please feel free to call one of the support group facilitators prior to attend to ask any questions you may have.

Survivors Helping Survivors

Date: 2nd Tuesday of each month
Time: 7-9 p.m.
Location: St. Luke's Medical Center,
Health Sciences Building #1,
Dining Room D
2901 W. Kinnickinnic River Parkway,
Milwaukee
Call Mary Ellen at (414) 543-0787 or
MHA (414) 276-3122

Survivors Helping Survivors

Date: 1st Thursday of each month
Time: 7-9 p.m.
New Location: Tri-City National Bank,
4295 W. Bradley Road, Brown Deer
Call Joan at (414) 545-8786 or MHA
(414) 276-3122

Survivors of Suicide

Date: 3rd Monday of each month
Time: 7 to 9 p.m.
Location: Waukesha Memorial Hospital,
725 American Ave., Waukesha
Call Jill at (262) 970-9738 or
JCol116@aol.com

Survivors of Suicide

Date: 1st Thursday of each month
Time: 7-9 p.m.
Location: Rogers Memorial Hospital
34700 Valley Road, Oconomowoc
Person/Phone: Michelle Unertl
(800) 767-4411 Ext. 580.

Survivors of Suicide Support Group

Date: 1st and 3rd Thursday of each month
Time: 6:30-8 p.m.
Location: NAMI Racine,
2300 De Koven Ave., Racine
Person/Phone: NAMI Racine
(262) 637-0582,
Facilitator: Luann Simpson, MSW, LCSW.

Death By Suicide Peer Support Group for Teens

Date: 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month
Time: 6-8 p.m.
Location: Kyle's Korner, 7106 W. North
Avenue, Wauwatosa
Call (414) 777-1585
Ongoing peer support group for children
ages 3 - 18 who have had someone close to
them die by suicide.

Death By Suicide Peer Support Group for Widows and Widowers

Date: Ongoing - Every other Wednesday
(Call for dates)
Time: noon - 1:30 p.m.
Location: Kyle's Korner,
7106 W. North Avenue, Wauwatosa
Call (414) 777-1585

For a listing of other support groups, including grief, depression, anxiety, and much more, visit our web site at www.mhawisconsin.org.

SURVIVORS HELPING SURVIVORS WOULD LIKE TO HEAR YOUR STORY

If you have a poem, meditation, poem, artwork or book review to share, email us your correspondence to danielle@mhawisconsin.org. You can also send your correspondence to Mental Health America of Wisconsin, 734 N. 4th Street, Suite 200, Milwaukee, WI 53203.

THANK YOU, SUSAN!

The north side Survivors Helping Survivors support group would like to thank Susan Getz for her years of service as our professional facilitator. A survivor herself, Susan brought personal insights to our meetings, as well as helping out in a professional capacity. We wish you the best in your new position!

CONSIDER MAKING A TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATION TO MENTAL HEALTH AMERICA

Mental Health America of Wisconsin relies on your donations to continue providing the community with quality services. Secure online donations can be made at www.mhawisconsin.org, or by mailing a check to Mental Health America of Wisconsin, 734 N. 4th Street, Suite 200, Milwaukee, WI 53203. Your support is deeply appreciated:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Please check the box if you DO NOT WISH to receive future editions of *The Bell*:

For more information on mental health issues, visit our web site at www.mhawisconsin.org

FOR THE LATEST INFORMATION ABOUT MHA PLEASE VISIT OUR WEB SITE AT WWW.MHAWISCONSIN.ORG

Survivors Helping Survivors

Survivors Helping Survivors is a quarterly Newsletter for families and friends who have lost someone to suicide. Comments and suggestions are always welcome. Contact Danielle Lennie at Mental Health America of Wisconsin (MHA) at (414) 276-3122.

Phone (414) 276-3122
Fax (414) 276-3124
Address 734 North 4th Street, Ste. 200
Milwaukee, WI 53203-2121

For more information on mental health issues, visit our web site at www.mhawisconsin.org



Board of Directors

David Franczyk, Chair
Judy McGregor, Chair-Elect
Jennifer Wittwer, Secretary
Larry Lenz, Treasurer

Camila Leffel
Ben Chernov
Caroline Lenyard
Lucy Rosenberg, M.D.
Michael Mihm

Virginia Stoffel
Judy Strauss
Sally Turner
Barbara White

NON-PROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Milwaukee, Wis.
Permit No. 5618

Return Service Requested



The MHA is a United Way agency.