



# **Journey of Hope**

## **Grief Support Groups**

### **Welcome Packet**

*Holding Hope With You*



### **Mission Statement:**

Our support groups exist to provide hope in the grief journey through the experience of a supportive community that gives space and time to process feelings of loss to bring healing to hearts.

### **Shared Values:**

Community of shared experiences  
Compassionate environment  
Confidentiality respected  
Conversational in approach  
Considerate of all beliefs

# VNA Hospice Grief Support Group Guidelines

**Each person's grief experience is unique.** Respect and accept both what you share in common with others and what is unique to you. Sharing should include elements of both "thinking and feeling".

**Grief is a process.** There is no specific timetable for how long it takes.

**Feel free to talk about your thoughts, feelings, and experiences of grief.** If someone decides to listen without sharing, please respect his or her preference.

**Active listening is encouraged.** Please avoid personal distractions, such as eating or retrieving tissues for others, as this may interrupt the flow of a participant's sharing.

**Confidentiality is encouraged out of respect for each group member.**

**Each person comes with the expectation that time will be available to express himself or herself.** Monopolizing the group's time is discouraged.

**Please be on time and enter the room quietly.** Entering late may be disruptive to those who are already sharing. Let the group know, before the meeting starts, if you need to leave early and then position yourself close to the exit. Please let your facilitator know if you will not be at the following meeting.

**Sharing ideas that helped you is encouraged.** Giving advice is quickly discouraged. Grief groups are intended for processing grief and obtaining support. They are not therapy groups.

**Keep the conversation on the topic of grief.** The facilitator will refocus the discussion back to grief, if necessary.

**A reasonable amount of time will be allowed for those who are overcome with deep emotion or need time to focus their thoughts.**

**Grief may be complicated by other areas of your life.** The facilitators can suggest additional support resources.

**The VNA Hospice Bereavement program has a zero tolerance for attending support groups after using alcohol and/or drugs other than prescription medications.**

# Understanding Grief

**Grief** – The internal thoughts and feelings we have when someone we love dies

**Mourning** – The outward expression of grief

**Bereavement** – Literally means “to be deprived by death” – bereavement is the process of mourning

## Common Symptoms of Grief

Shock, sadness, spiritual doubts, inability to focus, disbelief, anger, tiredness, foggy thinking, fear, guilt, lack of sleep, lack of energy, lack of purpose, change in eating/appetite.

## Grief is...

- The pain we feel when someone we love dies
- A normal response to loss
- A natural part of the life cycle
- Very individual—everyone grieves differently;
- There is no right or wrong way to grieve.
- An emotional roller coaster of highs and lows
- Often stressful
- A process that takes time. We all grieve in different ways and at different rates; there is no set timetable for how long it will last.

## Grief is not...

- A disorder or disease
- Contagious
- A sign of weakness

Grieving is a natural healing process that leads slowly from the pain of loss to hope for the future. Although grieving has been studied, no one can understand your grief as well as you. You are the expert on your own grief.

You may find it helpful to know about experiences other people have and how they cope with grief. One bereaved father said of his loss, “You don’t get over it; you just learn to live with it.”

Crying is one way of coping with grief. Tears express the sense of loss and release built-up tensions. Crying is not a sign of weakness but a way of cooperating with the natural healing process.

You may react physically to the death of a loved one. You may experience a loss of appetite, overeating, sleeplessness, sexual difficulties, lack of energy, difficulty concentrating, or some other physical problem.

Drugs and alcohol can stop or delay the healing process and should be avoided. Medication should be used sparingly and only under a doctor's care. Good food, fresh air, rest and physical activity can help your body to heal.

After your loss, you may feel you have nothing to live for. You may long for release from the intense pain. Be assured that others have faced despair and that in time their pain has lessened and a sense of meaning and purpose has returned to their lives.

Your thoughts may linger on past mistakes – real or imagined. Many people cope with such thoughts by expressing and discussing their regrets with others. Eventually they are able to forgive themselves and to release the troubling memories.

You may feel intensely angry, at times, at the person who died, or at family members, health professionals, people who have been spared a similar loss or even God. Bottling up anger seldom helps. On the other hand, expressing the anger in healthy ways can hasten the healing process.

A loved one's death can challenge your faith or philosophy of life. Questioning your beliefs can be frightening, but questioning can also deepen and enrich your faith or philosophy.

## **Tasks of Mourning (William Worden)**

1. To Accept the Reality of the death – Intellectually and emotionally (shock)
2. To Process the Pain of Grief – grief is experienced emotionally, physically, cognitively, and spiritually (disorganization)
3. To Adjust to a World without the Deceased – Learning to live without the presence of a loved one (reorganization)
4. To Find a Way to Remember the Deceased While embarking on the Rest of One's journey Through Life – living life fully, accepting joy, envisioning a future (the New Normal)

# How Long Does Grief Last?

## **Grief – A Journey into the Unknown**

What human being would willingly go on a journey in which the destination and time of arrival were unknown? Grief is such a journey. No one can predict when you will be able to engage with life fully again or what shape your life will take when you do.

The uncertainty of grief is difficult to bear. For this reason, many bereaved people and their friends are tempted to develop timetables and expectations for the grieving process. Unfortunately, books that describe typical stages of grief can be misinterpreted to support these expectations and timetables.

## **Time of Arrival – Unknown**

The most common timetables are those which try to rush the grieving process. Three weeks, three months, or one year may pass and you or your friends think that, by now, you should feel better. Even though there is no timetable for individual grief, it may be helpful to keep in mind that many people experience their most severe pain four to eight months after the death. Many people find that they need eighteen to twenty four months just to regain their equilibrium. Healing to a point where they feel real hope and appetite for life may take longer.

Less common, but equally harmful, are timetables which try to slow down the grieving process. A bereaved person may find the energy to enjoy life before it seems fitting. Friends may suspect disloyalty to the one who died, simply because their own timetables have not been met. It is helpful to remember that the pain of grief cannot be measured, regardless of its duration. People live their loyalty to their loved ones in many different ways. Respecting pain when you feel it and getting on with your own life when you can are both ways of demonstrating loyalty to your loved one.

## **Destination – Unknown**

Thomas Wolfe's title, "You Can't Go Home Again" is very true of the grieving process. We tend to hold onto the past, particularly when we have suffered a painful loss. The truth is that we cannot go back to the past, but when we try to imagine getting better we usually imagine the future in terms of what we have known of past happiness.

The journey of grief changes a person. After a loss, you are not the same. Passing through grief, being willing to walk along the unknown and unique path of your own pain and healing, can lead you to a new sense of yourself and new ways of shaping your life. Grief is a natural healing process. May you find comfort and companionship now, and may you gradually find hope for the future.



## ABOUT VNA SoCAL

VNA has been serving the Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside counties for over 65 years. We provide expert, experienced hospice health care as well as offering private duty, in-home services. Our agency can provide 24-hour nursing coverage to support patients and families. We are proud to offer the full continuum of healthcare in the community.

### **Mission**

We are a nonprofit healthcare organization dedication to providing compassionate care to the communities we serve.

### **Vision**

To be the trusted healthcare partner whose priority is giving back to our community.

### **Values**

Compassion  
Accountability  
Responsiveness  
Expertise  
Service

### **Our Services**

Home Health  
Hospice  
Palliative Care  
Private Duty  
Grief Support

**Call Us Today (800) 969-4862 or visit [www.vnasocal.org](http://www.vnasocal.org) for more information**