



Haven Herald



Letter from the Executive Director

Summer has arrived and it brings with it a hope for a slower pace and time off from our normal schedules. Haven slows down and takes time to evaluate and plan our programs for the year ahead. We are always looking for ways to better serve our community, and one way we can do that is to provide educational opportunities for our volunteers. We recently had an in-service for the volunteers on “Traumatic Grief” which was given by Duane Bowers, LPC, an experienced counselor in the areas of grief, anger and trauma. We learned many things from Duane’s presentation that will be helpful to our work.

This issue of the newsletter will focus on two complicated topics: delayed grief and traumatic grief. All grief is traumatic and painful but how we cope is an issue within itself. Traumatic grief can result in a diagnosable disorder called Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder that can require professional help. Delayed grief is grief that is not felt or talked about. Both types of grief cause great suffering but with help, they can get better. It is never too late to return to grief and it is always possible to get help for traumatic grief. There are many things that might be helpful, such as support groups or individual counseling, but moving forward with life can be extremely difficult for some people. Look for the signs that things are improving, and if you feel you are not at least getting somewhat better after about twelve months, consider talking to a professional grief counselor. The truth is about ten percent of those who have suffered a significant loss experience traumatic grief that lasts longer and is more severe. For most people grief is the natural process that takes place after the loss of a loved one, but for some it is a complex experience that takes more time and professional help.

Jill Bellacicco

Traumatic Grief

by Joyce Hanson



While delayed grief involves grief that is hidden, unrecognized, and/or denied, traumatic grief is that which is all too present and seemingly unending, causing one to be unable to move beyond the depths of one's anguished feelings. To some extent all grief is traumatic initially, and at our recent in service we learned from Mr. Bowers how to recognize what traumatic grief might look like.

Signs he described include the following: difficulty concentrating, difficulty learning, faulty memory, anger, feelings of negativity, repetitive thinking, detachment, and depression. While these may be present in the beginning, they often resolve as the tasks of mourning are worked through and the grief is processed.

However, there has recently been recognition of something called Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder. More pronounced and severe reactions that persist after a year may be an indication of the presence of this disorder. Some signs named by Mr. Bowers are these: intense sorrow and emotional pain, difficulty accepting the death with persistent longing for the deceased, preoccupation with the circumstances of the death, and anger and bitterness related to the loss. Other indications may be: wishing to die to be with the deceased, feeling that life is meaningless, being unable to experience positive reminiscing, and being reluctant to pursue one's own interests.

An important aspect of what was learned is an understanding of the levels of care Haven volunteers can provide and when professional help is desirable to achieve what Mr. Bowers describes as "re-grief" which is "the process of adjusting to a loss from a new perspective." Finally, there can be what he calls "post-traumatic growth" which is "the ability to express positive life change as a result of a traumatic event." This growth comes out of the coping struggle and has various manifestations. One may feel stronger and thus able to establish greater connections with others; one may recognize the existence of new possibilities leading to a change in priorities, and one may have a new appreciation for life, secure in the knowledge that life is once again worth living.

What Worked For Me

By Ed

My mother died when I was ten. When her funeral was ending, I stopped crying. I began to think of ways to manage my life. My father was a loving, caring, supportive man and I depended on him and received support for material things as well as for my education. But my concern was "What am I?" "How should I feel and talk and act?" I felt alone and dependent on myself for managing my life. The first way I managed to cope with my grieving was to say that I did not want people to ask me about my mother or her death. I did not want to talk about it. A few months after her death, I was visiting an aunt, my mother's sister, and seemed to be enjoying myself with a game; I overheard a conversation of my aunt and her friend. The friend said that I seemed to be doing well and my aunt clearly said, "Children forget quickly!" I said nothing but knew better. You don't forget. As is often said, "Life goes on." I grew physically, went to school, worked, and married. I was busy with living my life. For long periods of time, I did not think of my mother. But at times, for no reason I could determine, my mother's death crowded out all other thoughts, and I would be back to that moment when I stopped crying. These episodes would last only a short time and then I would bring myself back to my first coping message which was "Don't ask me and I won't tell."

I saw a notice in the paper that Haven of Northern Virginia, was going to have a support group for those with Early Mother Loss. "That's me," I said, "I'll go and see what they have to say." At the first visit, I realized when I saw the other people there that my feeling of being alone in a world where other people had mothers was wrong.

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When it was said that we were to tell our stories of our mother's deaths, I said to myself, "I can't do this. I don't talk about it." But after two or three others had spoken, my mouth somehow opened and I began. I was uneasy, talked slowly, my voice quavered, and I probably talked too long, but events I had not thought of in years came into my head and had to be told. I finally stopped, but I knew there was more for me to say. In later sessions, I told more than I had ever told anyone.

Twice while exiting Haven into a balmy spring night, I had a shaking chill. The first time I explained it to myself as being part of a stomach upset I had that day. The second time I could not use such an excuse. I knew this was something else. At our next session I discussed these chills and came to recognize them as outer physical expressions of inner emotions. I had not stopped crying. I was expressing it physically in another way.

When I finished the sessions at Haven, I knew I had a new and different and better feeling about myself and my loss. I thought I should discuss this with my wife, particularly since she had expressed an interest in my participating in the support group. So I began to tell her about my experience at Haven, when shortly I had an emotional release – translation I cried openly. I was back to the moment I stopped crying at the funeral. At the same time, the box I had put myself into fell apart. Now I can talk about my loss without tension. It is about time. I am eighty-two years of age.

You Know You Are Getting Better When...

By Helen Fitzgerald, CT

The progress through grief is so slow, and so often of a "one step forward and two steps backwards" motion, that it is difficult to see signs of improvement. The following are clues that will help you to see that you are beginning to work through your grief:

- You are in touch with the finality of the death. You now know in your heart that your loved one is truly gone and will never return to this earth.
- You can review both pleasant and unpleasant memories. In early grief, memories are painful because they remind you of how much you have lost. Now it feels good to remember, and you look for people to share memories with.
- You can reach out to help someone else in a similar situation. It is healing to be able to use your experience to help others. Some time passes in which you have not thought of your loved one. When this first happens, you may panic, thinking, "I am forgetting." This is not true. You will never forget. You are giving yourself permission to go on with your life and your loved one would want you to do this.
- You have developed a routine or a new schedule in your daily life that does not include your loved one.
- You can find something to be thankful for. You always knew there were good things going on in your life, but they didn't matter much before.
- You can establish new and healthy relationships. New friends are now part of your life and you enjoy participating in activities with them.
- You feel confident again. You are in touch with your new identity and have a stronger sense of what you are going to do with the rest of your life.
- You can accept things as they are and not keep trying to return things to what they were.
- You have patience with yourself through "grief attacks." You know they are becoming further apart and less frightening and painful.
- You stop to smell the flowers along the way and enjoy experiences in life that are meant to be enjoyed.



Excerpt from the American Hospice Foundation (www.americanhospice.org)



HOW HAVEN IS FUNDED

Haven is classified by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. It is funded mainly by donations from individuals in the community who wish to support our work and by those who donate in memory of a loved one. Donations are tax deductible. If you are interested in making a donation, please contact Haven at (703) 941-7000 or at havenofnova@verizon.net

Haven of Northern Virginia, Inc.

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Summer Schedule

Summer Workshop
“Journey through Grief”

Saturday, July 30, 2016

2:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Call or email Haven to register for the workshop

Drop-in Suicide Loss Support Group
1st and 3rd Saturdays of each month
11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Haven also offers individual support by phone and in person; please call to schedule an appointment. For immediate support without an appointment, a volunteer is available on a walk-in basis Monday through Friday between 10:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.

Contact Information

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Hours of Operation

Monday through Friday
9:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
www.havenofnova.org

Messages may be left on our voicemail after hours