



GriefConnections

Volume 5, Issue 2

October 2009

Do you know someone who would benefit from receiving this newsletter?

Want to receive *GriefConnections* in your email box every month—absolutely free! Simply send an email to; griefconnections@phillipsfuneralhome.com and write SUBSCRIBE TO GRIEF CONNECTIONS in the subject line.

Inservice Programs for Your Organization

Did you know that we can provide an inservice speaker for your organization? Whether you are looking for a group presentation on some aspect of grief counseling or a program on today's funeral options, we have an excellent group of speakers ready to respond. To talk about options for a workshop in your organization, please call Phillips Funeral Home at 607-936-9212 or email info@phillipsfuneralhome.com.

Helping Teens in Grief written by William G. Hoy

Robert died in a car crash at age 46, leaving his wife of 18 years, Barbara, and two teenage children: a 15 year old daughter and a 13 year old son. Certainly his family's grief was complicated, in part because of the unexpected trauma of Robert's death. Additional details discovered in the investigation, however, further complicated their grief. The accident occurred in a different city than the one in which he had told family and coworkers he would be visiting. And the investigation revealed he had spent the night in a motel with the woman who was killed in the accident with him.

Brittany and Bryan, the teens, were in need of support from their school, faith community, neighbors, and friends. Understandably, most of the people in the teens' world, were unsure of where to start. Here are some of the principles their caregivers and counselors learned in the aftermath of Robert's death.

Teach, model, and embrace the importance of truthfulness. With children and younger teens, well-meaning parents and friends often conspire to hold back part (or all) of the unpleasant truth. Bryan and Brittany's mother seriously considered not telling the kids about "the other woman," partly out of her own shock at the discovery. Not everyone was shocked, however; three of Robert's buddies had known of the affair for most of the last two years. Barbara's reticence to tell her kids what happened was understandable; she wanted to protect their image of Robert, as well as avoid the shame she felt on his behalf.

The problem with withholding the truth from children and teens, however, is really twofold. First, kids have an uncanny way of learning the truth. A family member or friend makes a casual comment, understandably expecting all the facts have been told; suddenly, the kids realize they haven't been told the truth. Second, when the kids do learn the whole painful truth, they begin wondering about the truthfulness of other things they have been told, eroding trust in their relationship with family members and friends at a time they most need to be able to trust.

Commit to truth-telling and help parents understand the importance of truthfulness. In my work with parents who are lying to their kids or who are grappling with whether or not to tell the "whole story," I inquire about how widely the "whole story" is known and then ask the parent to consider where they would most like their kids to hear the truth—from them or from someone else. My experience suggests children are rarely kept in the dark for long, and for teens, the truth is usually learned even more quickly. Truthfulness is really the only viable option.

Phillips

FUNERAL HOME & CREMATION SERVICE

Celebrating Life

Honoring Memories

www.phillipsfuneralhome.com

Phone: 607-936-9212

Helping Teens in Grief con't

Educate parents and other caregivers. Most of us must have missed the parenting class entitled, "Helping Your Children Deal with Death!" Perhaps we hope we'll never need to have these discussions, or perhaps we've never allowed ourselves to experience the full impact of our own losses, but whatever the reason, most parents really don't know what "normal" should look like in their grieving teenagers.

When I was called into a high school where several members of an athletic team had been killed in a rollover crash, one of my tasks was to meet with parents of grieving students. More than 200 concerned parents turned out for the meeting, and on reflection, I realize my greatest service to them was helping them normalize their kids' behaviors.

The teens had held a "memorial bonfire" at a nearby beach the night after the crash—and parents and teachers had been excluded. Several parents were concerned about the impromptu "shrines" of photos and memorabilia that had appeared in kids' rooms. And of course the school administration was grappling with what to do with the hundreds of candles, teddy bears, and other items that had been placed around the school's flagpole.

When it comes to a friend's death, teens tend to be very symbolic. My research into the therapeutic use of rituals and my experience with grieving people indicates this is both normal and helpful. Teens will turn out for the funeral, often whether they actually knew the deceased student or not. The only student who died during my high school career was two years behind me and not a student I knew at all. Yet, long before I became professionally interested in death and bereavement, I attended his funeral—mostly because that's what my friends were doing and I needed to be part of the "community of grief." Parents need to be taught that behaviors like these are entirely appropriate.

Protect teens' wish to not be identified or singled-out. Teens are most often caught up in wanting to fit in with their peers, so being identified as "different" because of the death of a parent or sibling may not be the "label" a kid wants to wear! More than with any other age group, teachers and school administrators, for example, need to learn directly from their bereaved students how much the student wants told to the entire student body. Remember that teens can be quite voyeuristic and may fear others "looking in on them" in the same way they had looked at others!

This hope for anonymity also complicates the provision of bereavement services to teens. Being part of a "grief group" might be very objectionable to a teen because he or she doesn't want to be different. I worked with one high school to provide a 30-minute lunch break grief group for the dozen students the counseling staff had identified. Instead of calling it a grief group, we called it a "lunch discussion," and presented the idea that these students had much to teach each other and the rest of us. We focused on what they were learning and what they still felt they needed to learn to effectively make sense of what had happened.

This very cognitive-sounding grief group actually surfaced some important affective material—but the group felt "safe" for those who didn't want to be singled out. Several months later when I was back on that campus, the school psychologist with whom I had worked pointed out to me that several of the kids still met at a corner lunch table on Fridays, the day our group met.

Teach and model the value of writing. Many teens are less expressive verbally than they are in written form. We sometimes learn much later that teens who are "pegged" as "kids who won't talk," are kids who keep volumes of journals about their experiences. Some of the most articulate words I have encountered were written by teens who scribbled them into journals rather than speaking them aloud to a grief group or individual counselor.

Teens sometimes need help getting started on journaling. After suggesting this invaluable way to "talk through their writing," suggest a few journal starters such as, "Today, I missed you the most when. . .," "I most remember this holiday because. . .," "My greatest memory of you was when we. . .," or "I am glad you were in my life because of the way you. . ." Invite teens to share some entry from their journal with you or with a group, but be sure no one feels pressured to share these words.

Respect the role of hormones. After puberty, the average male possess eight times the level of testosterone as the average female. This hormone is often maligned for its role in aggressive behavior and its affinity for "preventing emotional connection," but criticizing testosterone is like telling a person his ears are too large. It might be true, but there isn't much that can be done about it (apart from radical surgery!)

Without wading into the gender wars, what I know is that testosterone-flooded brains tend to process crises, stress, and bereavement differently than brains without such high levels. While I refuse to "blame it all on hormones," I believe we must continue to find safe, creative ways for teen boys to express grief that transcend asking them to tell their story, create memory boxes, and draw pictures. These strategies will find their place among some, to be sure, but we must also have other strategies.

Helping Teens in Grief con't

Most likely, effective bereavement interventions with teen boys, like their adult male counterparts, will come on the basketball court, the rock climbing wall, the camping trip, or the wood and metal shop. One of the most effective grief counselors with teen boys I have known helps boys make memory boxes, all right. They *make* memory boxes—using the power tools in his garage! By his account, more grief-related guided conversation occurs over the din of the power saws and drill presses than ever occurred in his pre-power tools days.

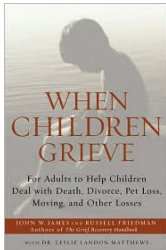
Grieving teens are not just adults who haven't quite grown up fully. Instead, they are people with unique ways of viewing life and death in the world around them. Perhaps the most important truth I have learned from supporting grieving teens, however, is to allow them to be *my teacher* and me *their learner*. Then, generation gaps fade, choices of music become unimportant, and we are all better served.

The Author: William G. (Bill) Hoy is an educator and counselor specializing in death, bereavement, and end-of-life issues. For more than 25 years, Dr. Hoy has counseled with bereaved individuals and families, and over the last several years, has been primarily involved in writing and presenting continuing education workshops for caregiving professionals. He is the author of *Guiding People Through Grief*, and his newest book, *Road to Emmaus: Pastoral Care with the Dying and Bereaved*.

Library Notes

Helping Teens Work Through Grief. Perschy, M. K. (2002). New York: Brunner & Routledge.

Now in its second edition, this workbook-sized volume is one of the most practical guides ever published for those who support grieving teens. The book includes an overview of developmental issues among grieving teens, more than 60 pages of ideas for activities for counseling, and three chapters on initiating and running a teen grief support group.



When Children Grieve. HarperCollins (2002). John W. James, Russell Friedman, Dr. Leslie Matthews
For Adults to Help Children Deal with Death, Divorce, Pet Loss, Moving and Other Losses.

To view or purchase a copy of *When Children Grieve* stop by the Special Memories Card & Gift Shop located at Phillips Funeral Home.

Grief Center of the Southern Tier, Grief Counselor, Sandi Follette

For the past 10 years, Sandi Follette has been reaching out to our community and touching lives. Sandi is a certified Grief Counselor. She received her certification through the Academy of Bereavement in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Sandi is the Executive Director of the Grief Center of the Southern Tier. The Grief Center is a non-profit organization which is funded solely through donations. Sandi accepts referrals from local counselors, schools and churches. The Grief Center's goal is to help people through the grieving process. The Grief Center is committed to helping individuals work through this life changing process. No one should grieve alone.



Grief is a subject that few want to talk about, but Sandi believes that offering knowledge about the process before a tragedy occurs gives strength. Sandi goes to schools and churches in the Corning-Elmira area and speaks on grief and the grieving process. Recently, Sandi has begun a new program that works with families as their loved one is dying. She walks through the dying process with them, being honest with them about the events that are going to occur. As she works with patients and families, she builds relationships where trust grows. Sandi offers a support system that is so desperately needed. Knowing someone is going to care, even to walk every inch of the dying process with the entire family, is an awesome gift to both the family and to the patient.

The Grief Center operates a large After-Loss program. Sandi leads a variety of Support Groups for those who have lost loved ones. When deaths have occurred in schools, Sandi has played an active role in assisting teachers and staff and offering counseling to students. Recently, Sandi has started a Support Group for those who have lost a loved one to Suicide. Losing someone to suicide can be a long and lonely journey. This support group is designed to help people realize that they aren't alone. The grieving process is a long and emotional one. Talking to others can really help heal those wounds.

For a comprehensive listing of Grief Resources go to our website:
www.phillipsfuneralhome.com
 Then click on:
 -Resource Center
 -Grief Resources

Or visit our Grief Resource Center at:
 Phillips Funeral Home
 17 West Pulteney Street
 Corning
 Monday through Friday
 9 am to 5 pm

Sandi Follette con't

Another brand new Support Group is one for those who have lost a Spouse. When someone loses a spouse, it affects every aspect of life. Suddenly, one feels very alone. Listening to others share about what they are experiencing with their loss can offer immense amounts of healing and strength. Please see page 4 for the dates and times of the Support Groups.

The Grief Center will be offering training events for anyone who is interested in learning more about becoming a grief counselor. Anyone who has a caring heart and a compassionate spirit can be a benefit to someone who is grieving. If this is something that interests you, please contact the Grief Center of the Southern Tier.

If you're interested in learning more about the Grief Center of the Southern Tier, or if you're interested in receiving their bi-monthly newsletter, please contact Sandi at 607-936-9077.

A couple of thoughts; "It doesn't matter what life gives you – what matters is what you give to life", "People will never remember what you say, but they will always remember what you do"...*authors unknown*.

October is Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month

October is Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month. This month is in recognition of an infant lost through; Early Pregnancy Loss (miscarriage), Stillbirth or Neonatal Loss. October 15th is Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Day. At 7 pm, parents and grandparents light a candle in remembrance of their little one.

More information about Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness can be found at www.nationalshare.org.

Awareness Pins can be purchased at Special Memories Card and Gift Shop located at Phillips Funeral Home.

Upcoming Events

Loss of a Spouse Support Group

Meets Wednesdays at 6:30 pm at Victory Highway Wesleyan Church, 150 Victory Highway, Painted Post. For more information, contact Sandi Follette at the Grief Center of the Southern Tier at 607-936-9077.

Loss of a Loved One to Suicide

Meets every other Thursday at 7 pm at Hand in Hand Methodist Church on Wardell Street, Elmira. For more information, contact Sandi Follette at the Grief Center of the Southern Tier at 607-936-9077.

Compassionate Friends Support Group

Meets last Wednesday of each month at 7 pm at Our Saviour Lutheran Church, 2872 Westinghouse Road, Horseheads. If you are interested in joining the group, contact Joann at 562-8090 or by email at jmorgan55@stny.rr.com.

We will only send *GriefConnections* if you want to receive it! You may unsubscribe from our newsletter anytime. Please just send an email to griefconnections@phillipsfuneralhome.com or click REPLY to this email and ask us to remove your name from our list.

GriefConnections is published monthly by Grief Resources, Inc. expressly for Phillips Funeral Home & Cremation Services. Copyright ©2005. All rights reserved, including publication or distribution in any form, electronic or printed. For reprint permissions or suggestions for content, please email us at GriefResources@cs.com.

Phillips

FUNERAL HOME & CREMATION SERVICE

Celebrating Life

Honoring Memories

www.phillipsfuneralhome.com

Phone: 607-936-9212