

Grace Grief Notes

Part of this Sacred Journey

Hospice nurse. One of the best things I could be, in my opinion. I love it so much! I didn't initially see myself as a hospice nurse. How could I ever make it in a nursing field that expects eventual death for every patient? However, I immediately felt not just com-

fortable in this role, but truly settled. I have definitely found my place at Grace Hospice.

Grief is abundant. It finds patients, their families, other

caregivers, and us. We all have different ways to address and hopefully process grief. The magic element for me is recognizing and embracing the spiritual component of each journey. With God in my heart and all around us, I feel strong and able to be more compas-

sionate, patient and caring... and at the end, I am keenly aware of the eternal glory and peace our dear patient now has.

I was on the other side of hospice care when my dad was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. We used a different agency because he was outside our service area. They weren't Grace, but they were kind. It almost didn't matter too much because I was with him that last week, as his daughter who continued to think like a hospice nurse. Knowing I was easing Mom's pain and fears by ensuring he was comfortable, well, that meant as much to me as being able to be with him through those final days. In the end, it was beautiful with prayers and love.

Experiencing hospice through my family's perspective changed me, and I think it makes me a better hospice nurse. Being on the other side of care brings an entirely new outlook. I can't name specific examples, but I just know I'm different.

I always say, it's okay if families don't remember my name or recognize me later. But if the journey and final moments with their loved one were better (or even beautiful!), I want to be someone who helped make that happen. The reward for me comes in the form of having been welcomed into their family and of course, bringing comfort for the patient.

I am confident that each of us has an impact as we are part of some of the most profound moments in the human experience. This brings extraordinary meaning and reward to what we do. Our calling to hospice gives us the opportunity to be an integral part of this sacred journey, and I couldn't be more proud or grateful to be on the Grace team.

Kathy Snell, RN Case Manager

Special points of interest:

- Children and Grief
- Book Review: *It's Okay to Laugh*
- Mother's Day Without Mom?
- Veteran Volunteers

If you would prefer to receive this newsletter electronically, please contact Jessica Steele at jgsteele@gracecaring.org.

Helping Children Through Grief and Loss

Everyone experiences grief and loss differently, and when it comes to helping children understand death, many of us don't know where to start. Prior to coming to Grace Hospice, I was a Child Life Specialist. My role was to help kids cope while undergoing medical experiences. Whether they were getting an IV, stitches, preparing for surgery, dealing with a new diagnosis, my role was to explain in "kid terms" what all this means. I also worked with many siblings who have lost a brother or sister.

Understanding death is difficult as an adult, so when kids face it, it can be overwhelming and confusing. Here are some tips that can help. **Infants and toddlers** don't yet have the ability to communicate effectively, but that doesn't mean they don't sense a big change, or the surrounding sadness and anxiety. They may have changes in sleeping and eating habits and can be increasingly clingy and irritable. Tips for helping: Keep a normal routine and structure as much as possible and maintain consistent caregivers.

Preschoolers (3-6 years) have vivid imaginations, so they often can be wrestling with big questions and magical thinking (i.e. that their loved one will come back, or that they may have caused the death). Children in this age group can also regress, have difficulty separating, and escape through play. By using simple and consistent language we can offer honest and



reassuring explanations around the death. Providing opportunities to play and be creative will allow for an outlet of emotions.

School-age (6-9 years) begin to view death as final. They also start to have increased curiosity about illness and death and how it affects the body. Identifying specific fears and misconceptions can help alleviate anxieties and help to foster a more healthy understanding of death. Maintaining routine with clear communication, providing opportunities to share memories about the loved one, and encouraging expressions of emotions can all help kids cope through grief and loss.

Older school-age (9-12 years) can often be more reflective around their own mortality and how a loss will affect their daily living. They may have many questions about the afterlife and can have a wide range of emotions. Changes in behavior at home and in school are quite common. Be available and open, validate feelings, and model healthy coping behaviors to best support them.

Adolescents have an adult understanding of death, though they often still feel invincible themselves. Peers are generally their main support, though parents/guardians should remain available. Giving space and staying available can be a hard balance, especially if you are grieving yourself. Finding a network of others who have experienced a similar loss can help lessen the burden and provide a safe space to process.

If there's a child in your life who could use some extra support, please contact:
Gretta Sullwold, CCLS
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Grace Hospice Book Review

By: Jessica Steele, Grief Support Counselor

It's Okay to Laugh (Crying Is Cool Too)

Copyright 2016 by Nora McInerny

Experiencing one significant death can cause us to have substantial feelings of grief and cause our emotions to be all over the map. In Nora McInerny's memoir, *It's Okay to Laugh*, she shares about her life and losing a pregnancy, her father, and her husband all within a two month time period. McInerny uses a very blunt approach to speak about the difficulties throughout her grief journey, and is frank about the good, the bad, and the ugly that occurred following three significant deaths in her life.

Cancer and the wide variety of feelings that come along with hearing that diagnosis and then working through it are discussed, as both her husband and father died from this disease. She utilizes humor and sarcasm when speaking about these challenges, but also is raw and real about the devastation she faced throughout the few years she and her

family were working through cancer treatment.

McInerny poses fresh perspectives on resilience after loss and morality. She shares many of the ways she attempted to cope with her losses, being very candid about which ones she found to be helpful, and the ones that may have been a hindrance. She speaks to the importance of having supportive individuals around you, and how some folks you imagined would be helpful tend to be more removed, and how others show up to help in your greatest time of need.

Topics that are often complicated for individuals to share about during their grief such as anger, intimacy, guilt, and



finding love after loss are so transparently spoken about throughout her writing. Within her book, McInerny truly creates a safe space to explore grief emotions, and feel what you're feeling. She is charismatic and real about the hills and valleys many experience, and her straightforward attitude will allow for many to relate.

Mother's Day Without Mom?

Saturday, May 2nd

11am—1 pm

Brighter Days Grief Center, Eden Prairie

Come and join other women to share stories and create a shadow box in honor of your mom.

What to bring:

Pictures, recipe cards, mementos of your mom, etc.

Grace Hospice will supply all other materials and light refreshments.

RSVP to Jessica at 612-322-4877 or jgsteele@gracecaring.org by April 15th, 2020. Space is limited.

Grace Hospice

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The mission of Grace Hospice is to serve God by recognizing that every person deserves to live out his or her life with respect and dignity, free of pain, and in an environment that promotes quality of life.

Are You A Veteran Interested in Volunteering?

Grace Hospice is a partner with We Honor Veterans and is committed to supporting those that have served our country. We believe that Veteran volunteers provide an extraordinary kind of support and companionship to our patients. Through visits, pinning ceremonies and more these volunteers are able to offer a final salute and thank you for serving our country. We are in search of Veterans to share their time and stories with our patients. Our visiting times are flexible and individualized for what works best for both you and the patient. Volunteers will be provided with training. If interested please contact Sarah Matthews at 651-485-2768 or smmatthews@gracecaring.org

