Journeys

A newsletter to help with grief

Kansas City Hospice
& PALLIATIVE CARE

Working Through Grief

Sorting Through

by Christy Hansen, LCSW
KCH Grief Support Specialist

When you must sort through a loved one's belongings, it can be an overwhelming and emotional task. Whether it's a home that holds a lifetime of memories or a shared space where many objects are a painful reminder, approaching the process with a plan can help soften the difficulty and make it manageable.

The 4 P's of Sorting

1. People
Who is best suited to help you with this task? Is it one that would be better tackled alone?

2. Priorities
Are there time-sensitive things that must be done right away? Are there things you can put off until you have more time or feel more ready? Look for tasks that can be saved for later. You can always box up pictures or mementos to sort through later when the pressure is off.

3. Plan
Break down your sorting into smaller tasks, starting with what feels easiest. Cleaning out a linen closet or pantry might feel like a smaller, more doable task and help you build confidence and momentum.

4. Pace Yourself
Work in chunks of time, no more than three or four hours. Plan meals so you don't find yourself hungry, tired and emotional. You might also plan a "buffer activity." Do something enjoyable, relaxing or soothing after a session.

Find Ways to Avoid Guilt

Sometimes it's easier to part with belongings when you know they're going to good use.

- Give sentimental items to family members as a remembrance.
- Give items to charity to benefit others.
- Try to not feel guilty about discarding items past their usefulness. Everything has its time.
- Take care of yourself.
- In the midst of any overwhelming task, give yourself grace and gentleness. Remember, the goal is not to finish quickly, but to feel you've done well.
- Honor your loved one and yourself in the process.

What & Where to Donate

KCH runs two resale boutiques that benefit families served by Kansas City Hospice. Story Boutique accepts gently used clothing, accessories and home decor. Heart & Soul finds a new home for furniture and larger estate items. Visit KCHospice.org/shop to learn more.

KC Pet Project can assist with the donation of pet supplies, towels and blankets.
KCpetproject.org/donate/shelter-wish-list

Cancer Action takes unused medical supplies for people currently dealing with cancer, 913.642.8885.

Most local pharmacies accept unused prescription medications for disposal, call ahead for availability.

More grief resources can be found on our website at KCHospice.org/griefresources

Working Through Grief

Learn how one local family moved forward in hope and peace by working through grief in programs specially designed for children and adults.

Greg & Mason

In the sweltering heat of August in Kansas City, Greg Curlett stepped into the backyard with his then five-year-old son, Mason. The last few months had been swallowed up in the disarray of caregiving for his wife, Christina, during her battle with stage 4 melanoma. He recalls now that he hadn't cut the grass in so long that its gentle sway hit him just below his knees. The world seemed to be moving in slow motion, and Greg was about to do the impossible.

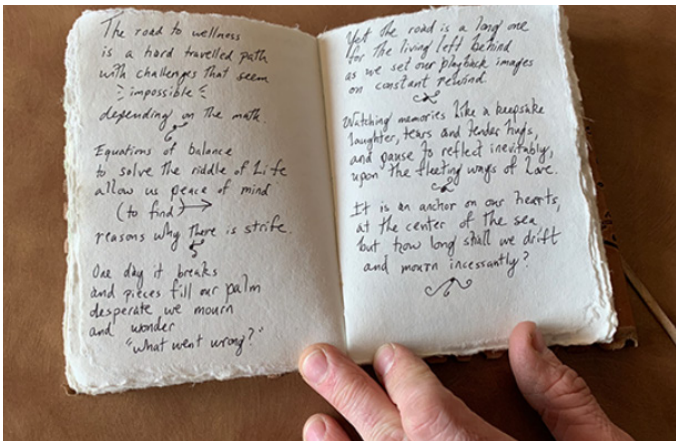
"I had to walk him out to the backyard and say, 'Mommy's gone. She is not sick anymore. She's at peace, she's okay, but she is not coming home'," Greg recalls. "I couldn't imagine a harder thing to do."

Moving Forward

After Christina died, Greg was referred to Solace House Center for Grief and Healing, a program of Kansas City Hospice. He began attending group sessions at Solace House and found the group setting helpful as others could understand what he was experiencing.

"Solace House was my anchor," Greg shares. "I would pay close attention to other people's stories and how they felt because it's not always cancer, there were suicides and other different stories. You never get selfish thinking this is only my pain or this is specifically 'my' story. It's like a bonding experience with all of these people." A few months after attending Solace House, Greg brought Mason to join other children in his age group. Solace House serves children as young as four, with each child or teen placed in groups based on age/developmental stage.

"Watching memories like a keepsake
laughter, tears and tender hugs,
and pause to reflect inevitably,
upon the fleeting ways of love."
– Greg Curlett



Greg found comfort in journaling and writing poetry.

Positive Growth

Mason was also able to attend Camp Erin, where children who have experienced the death of someone close to them learn the skills to cope with grief while having a fun camp experience. Mason continued to attend Solace House and Greg he has ended his time with Solace House as he continues to move forward.

Greg says the growth and positivity he found at Solace House makes him wish Christina could have met him as the man he is now, but everything that happened has led him to where he is today. In 2021, Greg and Mason shared their story with the community to help raise funds to help other families like them receive grief support services through Solace House.

"Everything is about positive growth. Recognizing the past and honoring it by moving forward, but not doing it in a selfish way."

Families are never charged for grief support groups or camp attendance, thanks to the generosity of our donors. For more information about KCH grief support services please visit KCHospice.org/grief

The Mourner's Bill of Rights

by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., C.T.

Though you should reach out to others as you do the work of mourning, you should not feel obligated to accept the unhelpful responses you may receive from some people. You are the one who is grieving, and as such, you have certain "rights" no one should try to take away from you. The following list is intended both to empower you to heal and to decide how others can and cannot help. This is not to discourage you from reaching out to others for help, but rather to assist you in distinguishing useful responses from hurtful ones.

1. You have the right to experience your own unique grief. No one else will grieve in the exact same way you do. So, when you turn to others for help, don't allow them to tell you what you should or should not be feeling.

2. You have the right to talk about your grief. Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk as much as you want about your grief. If at times you do not feel like talking, you also have the right to be silent.

3. You have the right to feel a multitude of emotions. Confusion, disorientation, fear, guilt, and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey. Others may try to tell you that feeling angry, for example, is wrong. Don't take these judgmental responses to heart. Instead, find listeners who will accept your feelings without conditions.

4. You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits. Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel ready to do.

5. You have the right to experience "grief bursts". Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but it is normal and natural. Find someone who understands and will let you talk it out.

6. You have the right to make use of ritual. The funeral ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. More importantly, the funeral is a way for you to mourn. If others tell you the funeral or other healing rituals such as these are silly or unnecessary, don't listen.

7. You have the right to embrace your spirituality. If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you feel angry at God, find someone to talk with who won't be critical of your feelings of hurt and abandonment.

8. You have the right to search for meaning. You may find yourself asking, "Why did he or she die? Why this way? Why now?" Some of your questions may have answers, but some may not. And watch out for the clichéd responses some people may give you. Comments like, "It was God's will" or "Think of what you have to be thankful for" are not helpful and you do not have to accept them.

9. You have the right to treasure your memories. Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. You will always remember. Instead of ignoring your memories, find others with whom you can share them.

10. You have the right to move toward your grief and heal. Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly. Remember, grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you must forget that the death of someone loved changes your life forever.

Recommended Book List

Adult Books

How To Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies
Therese A. Rando, Ph.D.
It's OK That You're NOT OK
Megan Devine
Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy
Sheryl Sandberg & Adam Grant
What's Your Grief?: Lists to Help You Through Any Loss
Eleanor Haley & Litsa Williams

Pre-teen/Teen Books

Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss
Pat Schwiebert & Chuck DeKlyen
Grief is a Mess
Jackie Schuld
Death is Stupid
Anastasia Higgenbotham
The House that Lou Built
Mae Respicio
Crying in H Mart
Michelle Zauner
Welcome to the Grief Club: Because You Don't Have to Go Through It Alone
Janine Kwoh

Kids Books

The Rabbit Listened
Cori Doerfeld
My Big Dumb Invisible Dragon
Angie Lucas
Cape
Kevin Johnson
Grief is an Elephant
Tamara Ellis Smith
The Invisible String
Patrice Karst

Recommended Grief Resources

Websites:

KCHospice.org
Whatsyourgrief.com
Elunanetwork.org
Childrengrieve.org
Refugeingrief.com
AfterTalk.com
Griefshare.org

Podcasts:

What's Your Grief
Grief Out Loud (The Dougy Center)
Terrible, Thanks for Asking (Nora McInerny)
Everything Happens (Kate Bowler)

Specific Loss and/or Experience Resources in the KC Community:

Zero Reasons Why - Mental awareness and suicide prevention school program
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255 - 24/7 support
SASS KC - Programs for families who have experienced a sucide death
Compassionate Friends - Programs for families who have experienced the death of a child
Turning Point - Programs for families facing a lifelong or life-ending illness
Gilda's Club - Programs for families experiencing a cancer diagnosis
First Call - Programs for families experiencing issues related to substance use disorders
Healing Pathways - Programs for families who have experienced a homicide or suicide death
Advent Health - Programs for families who have experienced pregnancy or infant loss

Additional Grief Resources

SOLACE HOUSE
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& PALLIATIVE CARE

913.341.0318
SolaceHouse.org

What's Your Grief?
whatsyourgrief.com

Visit Us Online
KCHospice.org/grief
Learn about our services, resources, previous issues of *Journeys* and more.