



Talking about it can put grief in perspective

By SHIRLEE IDEN

What do you say to a grieving mother, brother or wife?

And what might they say to you? If you're talking to Betty Rabaut or Teddy Kelm, they'll tell you they're coping. And it's because they do talk about their loss and share with others who have faced tragedy.

The two Southfield women are active in a support group called "Good Grief" which assembles at 8 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month. The meetings are in the teachers' lounge at St. Bede School.

And if you could eavesdrop at such a gathering, you might find 12 to 18 persons quietly sharing, perhaps crying, but trying hard to go on and find meaning in life.

Four years ago, Betty Rabaut might have said:

"It was an afternoon in May and I was grocery shopping. As I drove into the driveway with my packages, I had a terrible premonition that something had happened. A neighbor ran over to say they'd take me to the hospital, that something had happened to Paul."

Paul, the Rabauts' eldest son, had taken a year off from school after



There's value in talking about grief and in knowing there are definite stages bereaved people go through. Teddy Kelm (left) and Betty Rabaut belong to a support group where people can share and even cry. (Staff photo by Mindy Saunders)

graduation from Groves High School. He established his own painting firm and was doing independent contracting when tragedy struck.

"He was moving an aluminum ladder when it was hit by lightning. Paul was electrocuted," she said.

TEDDY KELM became a widow when her husband died unexpectedly more than four years ago.

"My husband was just 55 years old. He had a heart attack on the operating

table after going in for a simple heart catheterization," Mrs. Kelm said.

Though one family lost the husband and father and the other a son and brother, Mrs. Rabaut points out that in grief management, there are always basic similarities and stages one goes through.

She didn't learn this by herself, but by seeking understanding.

"About four months after Paul died, Rev. Robert Weikart, who lives in Chelsea, Mich., did a workshop on grief and

Rabaut belong to a support group where people can share and even cry. (Staff photo by Mindy Saunders)

I heard him," she said.

"It put things in perspective for me. I could place myself in the stages of grief that he discussed. I invited him to come to our parish and he did."

Immediately eight people signed up for the St. Bede session.

"Except for summer, we meet each month," she said. "It isn't always the same people. They come and go. Some return at the anniversary of a death."

Mrs. Kelm became active in the group about six months ago and says it's never too late to receive the kind of reassurance "Good Grief" can offer the bereaved.

did not all respond to their brother's death in the same way.

"One daughter really can't talk about Paul too well," she said. "The other daughter shares quite freely and the younger two have always talked about him easily. My husband, Paul and I try to speak of him often."

Quietly she offers: "Following my husband's death, my son David has decided he wants to be a doctor."

What both women have come to understand is that grief is the normal and natural process by which people make a healthy adjustment to any significant loss in life such as death or divorce.

Stage one is shock, denial and disbelief and can last from an hour to a week. Then comes emotional release by tears, cursing, working it out.

A third stage can occur whereby physical manifestations happen with the bereaved feeling the symptoms that deceased had and not sleeping or eating.

Then depression and detachment may bring the blais and subsequent loss of meaning, even a potential for suicide. A guilt stage involves questioning about involvement and may include real guilt and unreal guilt.

Then, anger and rebellion often erupt, and irrational hostility. A seventh stage of grief is idealization of the deceased, the feeling that only the past was perfect and the future holds little.

The eighth stage begins the realization that the past had its faults and the future may not be so bad. Then new patterns evolve with the bereaved reaching out to new careers, new associations.

The final stage is living with the loss, the completion of grief work that means the loss is recognized, but the person is no longer disturbed by it.

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