

Grieving is foundation for new start

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trusting gesture, such as holding someone to comfort them.

"For those who are trying to offer comfort to a grieving person," Weikart says, "the two most important things are to listen and to maintain contact, whether it's phone calls, cups of coffee or whatever. Above all, keep in touch with the person and let him or her talk."

3. PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS. "People may develop a physical pain similar to what their spouse died of," Weikart explains. "These are similar to sympathy pains. In other cases, you'll see the survivor wearing the clothes of the deceased, such as a flannel shirt when out in the yard. Or some people will go back to take up the deceased's occupation. This can be very healthy if the survivors are aware of what they are doing and are also maintaining their own interests."

4. ALIENATION — LONELINESS SETS IN. "This can be little things like going to a restaurant and telling the hostess you're 'just one for dinner,'" Weikart explains, "to getting mail still addressed to 'Mr. and Mrs.' Sometimes special days such as Mother's Day trigger the loneliness when there's no one to send you a card, or no one for you to send one to."

"This is dangerous point, where people are prone to turn to alcohol or sui-

cide because they feel the pain is unbearable. This is where I hope to get people into New Beginnings, where we can help to grieve in a healthy manner. What I often tell people is a phrase that I received many years ago, it would be inexcusably selfish to be lonely alone."

5. GUILT. "There are three kinds of guilt," Weikart says. "Realistic guilt, for example, would be if you were driving and drinking and killed someone. Unrealistic guilt might be when you hear people say, 'I should have stayed at her bedside, then she wouldn't have died' and guilt about things having not been said or apologies made."

For some religious persons, he adds, there is also "a guilt towards God and a struggle to find meaning in relationship to God. In the group, we try to help people feel that they're still lovable and acceptable despite their guilt — and despite what those around them may be saying."

6. HOSTILITY. "People will have accidents or injure themselves," Weikart says, "because they're angry at the death and don't know to whom to show it or how to show it."

7. PERFECTION. "This is where you'll hear things like, 'He was the best golfer I ever saw,' or 'the worst cook.' This is healthy because it means you're beginning to take stock of your loss and seeing what you miss because of the loss."

8. REDEMPTION. "This is the time when the surviving person is able to see the dead person as both good and not so good," Weikart noted. "You begin to accept the lost person for what he or she was."

9. NEW LIFE. "This is when you keep some things from the past and bring in some new things. The combination of the two is your future," Weikart said. "You don't leave the past untouched and you don't get rid of the past totally — it's a combination. Some people hold on to the past indefinitely by continuing to set a place at the table for the dead person five years or more after the death. Others will sell their possessions and house and move very quickly to avoid being reminded of their loved one who died. If people are working on their grief — that is, talking to someone about their feelings — they may exhibit some of these characteristics, but they'll be sorting out their emotional feelings at the same time."

But those who try to deny their grief — or remain stuck in the past hoping the dead will return — will probably experience a delayed grief reaction months or even years later."

10. RESURRECTION. "Using the biblical reference as an example," Weikart said, "after Jesus rose from the dead, he looked and sounded the same, but he was different — he was fuller and richer for the experience."

You could see the scars and the prints of the wounds, but they were healed. It's the same way for us — you'll always have part of that loss with you, but you're alive and whole and have your own life."

"Individuals may or may not experience all 10 phases and not necessarily in this order," Weikart concluded. "But it's important for people who are grieving not to feel that they are 'crazy' or to let people tell them, 'It's all in your head.' Be bold and say you're hurting. Grief is very real."

New Beginnings groups are free of charge and the U-M Family Practice Center in Chelsea (475-1321, Ext. 430) can supply a list of locations and phone numbers.

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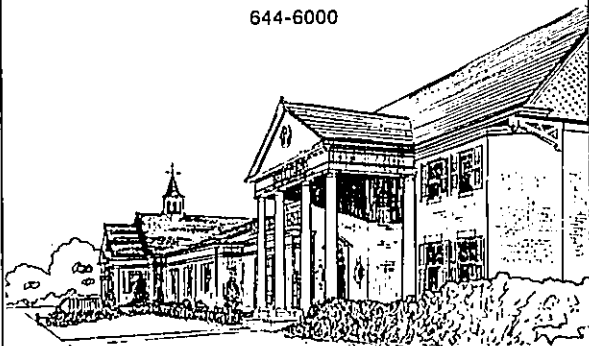
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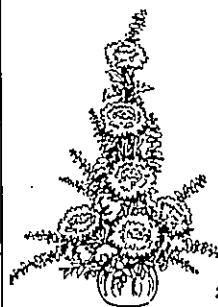
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