



Bereavement Newsletter

June 2016

200 Fourth Circle • Dodge City, KS

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Grief and Getting a Good Night's Sleep

It's common for people to experience a change in their sleeping pattern in the days, weeks and months following the loss of a loved one. Grievers may have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. On the other end of the spectrum, grievers may find it difficult to stay awake ('when the going gets tough, the tough goes to bed,' I like to say). Reasons why a griever might have difficulty sleeping after a death include...

- Intrusive thoughts
- Worries and anxieties about stressors that have occurred as a result of the death
- Bad dreams
- Anxiety about having bad dreams
- Trouble sleeping in the bed they shared with their partner
- Disorders like depression, insomnia and PTSD

Although what constitutes a full

night of sleep varies from person to person, 7-8 hours are typically considered sufficient. If you find you hover around six or fewer hours of sleep a night, for whatever reason, you may want to consider making a few changes. Although it sometimes seems like grief and sleep cannot co-exist, adequate sleep for the grieving is essential.

I have put together a few practical and basic suggestions for sleeping better, but we are by no means sleep experts. If you've already tried everything we've compiled here and you're still having difficulty sleeping, you may want to speak with your doctor or therapist. This is not a subtle suggestion to take sleep medication, but a recommendation to speak with a professional who might suggest interventions you haven't tried or refer you to a sleep specialist in your area.

Sleep Environment:

Having an environment conducive to sleep is an important part of getting the rest you need. It's a good idea to eliminate elements that contribute to wakefulness and arrange your sleeping quarters in a way that is actually focused on sleeping. This means you might want to do the following...

- Block out as much light as possible at night.
- Use ear plugs and/or an eye mask if necessary.
- Leave your phone in the other room so you don't wake up every time you receive an e-mail and furthermore so you aren't tempted to check your email at 1am.
- Sleep in a well ventilated room. Aim for a temperature between 60-68 degrees.

(continued on page 2)

Coming Soon!

Hospice of the Prairie 10th Annual Kids Day Camp

Children, age 7-12 who have experienced the death of a loved one, are invited for a day of summertime fun, crafts and games! Kids will also learn about the journey of grief and take home meaningful craft projects. Lunch and snacks are provided.

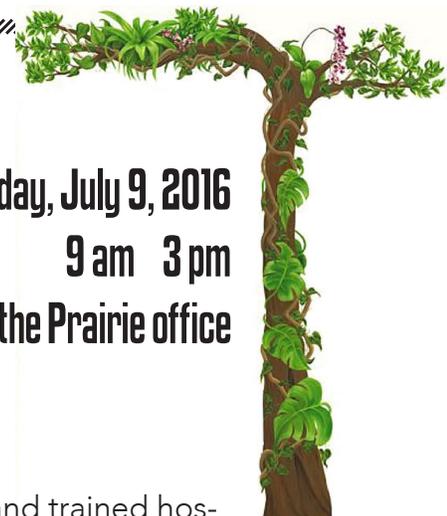


Saturday, July 9, 2016

9 am 3 pm

Hospice of the Prairie office

Our Day Camp is offered at no cost and trained hospice staff and volunteers will be facilitating the camp. Pre-registration is required. Call Nancy Renner at 227-7209 or 1-800-466-7209.



Good Night's Sleep (continued from page 1)

- If nighttime typically leads to a battles over the blanket, consider having a blanket for each person in the bed. Sharing a blanket often makes you more aware of your sleep mate's every move and can increase heat.
- Make sure your bed is comfortable – this means a good mattress, pillows and bedding.
- If you don't have one already, find a source for white noise. Those of you who grew up without air conditioning know that once you get used to the whir of a box fan, you can never sleep without white noise again. White noise blocks out sudden variations in sound which many are hard-wired to attend to during sleep (like mothers of newborns).
- Avoid doing anything stimulating, frustrating, or anxiety provoking in the bed or bedroom. You want your brain and body to associate the bed and bedroom with sleep.

A note on the other side of the bed: Sadly for those whose partner has died the emptiness of the other side of the bed can trigger painful memories and difficult emotion. You can try and rearrange the room, get a new



bed, or sleep in another room of the house. This might help for some, but for many the sense of sleeping beside someone transcends their bedding and the arrangement of the objects in their room. Sleeping alone is just one of the many things those who've lost a partner must learn to live with. In the mean time, maybe let the dog sleep on the bed if he promises not to slobber or get a body pillow. I know that sounds silly, but comfort can be found in the strangest of places.

Routine and Ritual:

Experts agree establishing a bedtime routine is an effective way to tell the brain it's time to wind down and get ready to sleep. Rituals might include things like setting the lights down low an hour before bed, reading a chapter in a book, snuggling with your mate or furry friend, taking a warm bath, journaling listening to soothing music, meditating and do whatever it is you do to stay beautiful. Stick to a generally consistent bedtime and try to get up around the same time each day.

Don't:

- Take naps late in the day. In fact you might want to avoid them altogether.
- Drink caffeinated beverages in the evening.
 - Drink coffee after noon. Five hours after drinking a cup of coffee, half of its caffeine content is still in your system.
 - Smoke before bed (or at all). Nicotine is a stimulant that can lead to sleep disturbances.
 - Drink alcohol before bed.

Sure that glass of wine might relax you enough to fall asleep, but your sleep cycle suffers as the body works to break down the alcohol and you end up hav-

ing a restless night of sleep.

- Expose yourself to harsh light from bright indoor lights and TV, tablet and computer screens 1-2 hours before bedtime. These bright lights can trick the brain into thinking it's earlier in the day and lead it to suppress melatonin which is the body's natural sleep chemical.

Do:

- Go to bed when you feel sleepy.
- Get some form of moderate exercise during the day. However, you should avoid exercise in the hours before bed.
- Meditate.
- Perform calm and relaxing activities in the hour before bed.

When you can't sleep:

- Get out of bed and go to a darkened room for 30-60 minutes. Read a book or try journaling about whatever you're feeling or struggling with.
- You know the old 'never go to bed mad' adage? Well there may be a grain of truth in working to resolve the conflicts that keep you awake at night. For many it's the things they've yet to do, fix or settle that tend to occupy their thoughts as they lay in bed.
- Are you having nightmares or are worried about having them? Consider the level of anxiety, fear, worry and trauma you're dealing with. As you cope with the loss some of this will ease, but if you continue to have nightmares you may want to talk to a counselor.
- When you can't stop your mind from racing or if you struggle with negative intrusive thoughts, try thinking of something cerebral or calming like counting backwards from 1000 by 3s or thinking of a girl's name for every letter of the alphabet.
- Talk to your doctor.

Father's Day and Grief

As it is with many holidays throughout the year, Father's Day, often sparks a multitude of emotions, especially when you're in the midst of grief. While we hear primarily from children who are grieving the death of a father or father-figure and fathers who have lost a child, the day can be equally treacherous for those with complex relationships to fathers and fatherhood. Just a simple trip to the store can be a challenge during the lead up to Father's Day. Those in grief face the barrage of card aisles and advertisements for "Great gifts for Dads!" along with well-meaning questions from friends and others about their plans. Then there is the day itself, which can be overwhelming to consider. It can also prompt new, creative ways to acknowledge the day, including doing nothing at all!

If you're concerned about the approach of Father's Day or want to support someone who is, here are some suggestions to consider:

1. Remember that the lead up can often be the hardest part. Be sure to build in time and activities that are comforting and supportive for at least a week before the holiday.

2. Come up with a plan - even if that plan is to do nothing. If you choose to acknowledge the day, consider doing something that connects you with who the person was and

what they meant to you.

3. With children, it's helpful to talk with them ahead of time about what they would like to do or not do. You may need to do some negotiating as siblings can have different ideas about what to do. If one child wants to do something and another doesn't, reach out to friends or family to see if they can help with the "being in two places at once" dilemma.

4. Children may also have to navigate Father's Day activities in school, so check in with teachers ahead of time to find out what is planned and include your children in a discussion about what would work best for them.

5. Let children know that it's okay to want to celebrate and equally okay to not want to. Don't force a child to pick another adult to honor, unless it's something they want to do.

6. Be prepared for other people! There will be friends and family who reach out and those who don't. Consider letting people know ahead of time what kinds of messages and texts feel supportive (and which ones don't). It's commonplace for cashiers, wait staff, and even random strangers to say "Happy Father's Day!" or ask "How's your Father's Day going?" so it can be helpful to come up with a few answers ahead of time. Some people choose to be honest and say something like, "Not so great. My

dad died this year." and others prefer a curt, "Fine. Yours?" There's no right or wrong way to respond.

7. Social media is likely to be a flood of posts all about Father's Day, including memories of past years. Consider taking a social media break or choose ahead of time what you want to post.

8. Plan something for yourself - hike, brunch with friends, a trip out of town. Think through what environment you want to be in, knowing that you are likely to run into dads and families.

9. Focus on a category - say food, movies, activities, color, or music - choose a few from one or all the categories that your dad or child loved. If you don't know, and many people don't, go with your best guess or pick the ones you love.

10. Volunteer - doing for others can often take us out of our own experience and create a sense of contribution, belonging, and connection.

In the end, how you approach Father's Day is as unique as grief and your relationship with the person who died. Let yourself be creative in figuring out what works, and allow yourself to change your mind at the last minute.

help@dougy.org

*"What the caterpillar calls
the end of the world,
the master calls
a butterfly."*

-- Richard Bach



Hospice of the Prairie & Prairie Home Health has a Facebook page!



“Like” us on Facebook to find updates on the latest events and programs at Hospice of the Prairie & Prairie Home Health as well as links to great stories and other resources.

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Calendar of Upcoming Events

- June 9 Grief Support Group (English), 6:30 pm, Hospice of the Prairie Meeting Room; Jerry Hodges, facilitator
- June 13 Compassionate Friends Support Group, for families who have lost a child, 7pm, Hospice of the Prairie meeting room
- June 15 Bereavement Luncheon, 12 noon, Inn Pancake House, 1610 W. Wyatt Earp, Dodge City; Jeff Turner, host
- June 21 Grief Support Group (Spanish), 6:30 pm, Hospice of the Prairie meeting room, Yadira Deana, facilitator.
- June 23 Grief Support Group (English), 6:30 pm, Hospice of the Prairie Meeting, Room; Jerry Hodges, facilitator
- July 9 Kids Camp, 9 am-3 pm. Call 227-7209 to pre-register

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