

Directory of Services

St. Thérèse Parish Office....(619) 582-3716

- † To speak with a Priest
- † To arrange home Eucharist/Visitation
- † To make funeral arrangements
- † To request memorial masses

Ministry Center.....(619) 286-4605

- † Grief Workshops
- † Children's Grief
- † Support Groups
- † Comfort for the terminally ill
and recently bereaved

Catholic Charities.....(619) 231-2828

- † Counseling References

**St. Thérèse Catholic Church
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San Diego, CA 92120**



NEW HOPE

GRIEF HANDBOOK



*Blessed are they who mourn
for they shall be comforted.*

~
Jesus in Matthew's Gospel 5:4

*With sympathy and caring from
St. Thérèse Catholic Church*

Introduction

Life has changed for you because someone close to you has died, or is critically ill. Whether the death is sudden or expected you may experience a range of strong and painful feelings such as shock, anger, anxiety and sadness. Grieving is the process of going through these painful feelings and learning to live without that person in your life.

This handbook aims to help you understand your grief and cope with the issues you face at this time. It includes the emotional and physical reactions to grief and loss, suggestions for helping yourself and others through grief, a special section on grief and children, and some spiritual resources. We hope it may offer some help in this difficult time.

Grief shakes us to our very core, and can often leave us feeling even a loss of faith. This is precisely why God calls us "as a people." May *our* belief help to encourage you, *our* prayers sustain you, and *our* witness give you hope.

In the back of this booklet you will find phone numbers for a variety of services and ministries to assist you. Please call any-time.

We offer you the prayers and support of our faith community along with our sincerest condolences.

This poem by Rainer Maria Rilke expresses not only our experience of grief but also our deepest need for God to "Break in" with healing, with hope, with the peace that comes from God alone...

**It is possible that I am passing
through solid rock
while the oar lies, alone;
Everything is close to my face
and everything
close to my face
is stone.**

**I have no acquaintance yet
with grief,
so this vast darkness
makes me feel small;
You are the one:
make Yourself fierce,
break in:
Then Your great transforming
can happen to me,
and my great grief cry
can happen to you.**

significant as we face the death of someone dear to us.

Scriptures for reflection:

Matthew 5:4 - Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Psalm 31:9 - Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief.

Revelation 21:4 - He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Psalm 34:18 - The LORD is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Isaiah 53:4 - Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows.

1 Thessalonians 4:14 - We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

Romans 14:9 - For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-4 -There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a



**The personal experience
of loss or change**

Everyone reacts differently to death and it is important to remember that there is no right or wrong way to grieve.

The way you experience grief will be affected by the level of support you have, the relationship you had with the person who has died, your previous experience of loss and death, your personality and the extent to which your life changes as a result of the death.

Grieving persons often revisit the emotional reactions to their loss many times over during the acute phase of their loss, especially in the first few years following the loss of their loved one.

The grieving person needs to know and re-hearse often:

**Everything you feel and experience
In your grief is normal
And
You are not going crazy!**

You may experience some of the following emotional and physical reactions when someone close to you dies.

Disbelief

The initial response to bad news is often one of disbelief - you feel what has happened is unreal, almost like a bad dream. This sense of disbelief can stay with you for some time.

Shock

You may feel numb, bewildered, stunned and unable to think clearly. In some ways shock protects you from the full impact of the death. The sense of numbness will start to fade in a few days or weeks, although it may return from time to time.

Longing and Searching

You may have a sense of longing for the person who has died, to see, hear, hold and talk to him / her. At times you may find yourself looking for the person or feel you have seen or heard him / her, perhaps in a crowd or a familiar place.

Anger

This is a normal response to your loss. People frequently feel angry at the unfairness

sacrifice He asked us to celebrate as a continuing memorial of His death and resurrection. It is a pledge of future glory which sustains us all through life and is especially



May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word." **2 Thessalonians 2:16**

As Catholics, our belief in purgatory offers the assurance of heaven as well. In the words of James Boswell, "We are of the opinion that the generality of mankind are neither so obstinately wicked as to deserve everlasting punishment, nor so good as to merit being admitted into the society of the blessed saints; and therefore that God is graciously pleased to allow a middle state, where they may be purified by certain degrees of suffering and so enter heaven."

The **Holy Spirit** – also called the Comforter (John 14:26) – can give us God's peace, even in the midst of suffering.

Philippians 4:6-7 tells us, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

The peace of God does not come from our circumstances, but from drawing close to Him.

The **Eucharist** is of central importance in our spiritual lives, it is also of central importance in our celebration of Christian death. At the last supper, on the night before He died for us, our Savior transformed bread and wine into His own body and blood which He offered to His Father as a sacrifice acceptable to Him. This is the Eucharistic

of life or at God for allowing the death to happen. It is also common to feel angry with yourself, family or friends or with those who were involved with caring at the time of the illness and death. You may also be angry with the deceased for leaving you at this time.

Guilt

There is a tendency to go over the events surrounding the death again and again. Bereaved people may blame themselves for things done or left undone, words said or left unsaid. If you feel there was something you could have done to prevent the death, it is important to remember that people sometimes make decisions over which you have no control. You may find yourself focusing on a difficult time in your relationship. Remember that happy and unhappy times are a feature of all relationships. Feelings of guilt are normal though often not justified. It is best to discuss these feelings with your priest or someone you trust.

Despair and Hopelessness

At times, you may feel you cannot bear the pain any longer and think you won't survive this loss. It helps to talk about this despair to someone close to you or to your doctor or other professional you know.

Depression

Depression is a feeling of overwhelming sadness and hopelessness that is often experienced following bereavement. You lose interest in everything and ordinary everyday tasks require a lot of effort. Other symptoms may include difficulty with sleep, appetite problems, crying continuously or inability to cry, withdrawal from family and friends, poor concentration and forgetfulness. These symptoms are a normal part of the grief process and therefore should not cause undue concern. However, if they become very intense and are experienced over a long period of time you should seek your doctor's advice.

Anxiety and Fears

Following bereavement feelings of anxiety are common. You may feel very vulnerable, lose confidence in yourself and in the world, fear for the well-being of others and perhaps fear that something else terrible will happen. You may doubt your ability to cope and be slow to admit this to yourself or others for fear of losing control. Anxiety may lead to panic attacks.

Loneliness and Sadness

The loss of a special relationship leaves you feeling sad, lonely and empty. You are with-

As our Savior and Redeemer, He took all our sins to the cross and forgives us when we ask. As our Good Shepherd, He leads us safely through "the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23:4). Remember, a shadow indicates that there is a light on the other side!

Deep faith in Christ does not prevent grief, but it infuses grief with hope! For Christians, death is a passageway to eternal life (John 5:24). Paul said in I Thessalonians 4:13 - We do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.

Well-meaning people may say, "God took your loved one away," but that can cause people – especially children – to be angry at God. 1 Corinthians 15:26 says death is our last enemy. Therefore, we can say, "Death took our loved one away from us, but Jesus took our loved one away from death!"

If we don't know whether our loved one believed in Jesus, we must simply trust God. The Bible says, "The Lord ... is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should have eternal life." (2 Peter 3:9). We do not know what happens in a person's final moments between life and death, but God does – and He decides who enters His heaven.

God's Viewpoint

If you're in the process of grieving, you know that it isn't a simple experience--it's a tumultuous time of conflicting emotions: but knowing that the experience is identifiable doesn't do much to help us through the dark times when a terrible loss leaves us feeling as though a piece of our very soul has been ripped away.

Jesus is our best role model for combining faith and grief. When He saw Mary and Martha in anguish over the death of their brother Lazarus, He wept and groaned. Although Jesus knew He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead, He still felt – and expressed – the depths of human sorrow.



We can take comfort in knowing that Jesus has experienced all of our pain, including loss, rejection, betrayal, and dying.

out the love and understanding of that person. Eventually, others appear to get on with their own lives and you may be feeling very alone. Friends and family may withdraw because they feel helpless. When you have lost a partner or close friend you may be especially lonely because you are without the person with whom you shared everyday activities.

Relief

It is normal to feel relieved that the person's suffering is over. It is also normal to feel relieved that a person for whom you bore the burden of care or with whom you had a difficult relationship is no longer here and you can begin a new life. You may feel guilty about these feelings but they are a normal part of grief.

Physical Reactions

Grief not only affects you emotionally but also physically. Some common symptoms are lack of energy, appetite changes, difficulty in sleeping, nausea, diarrhea, a tight feeling in the chest, headaches, muscular tension, inability to concentrate and a tendency to be forgetful. It helps to understand that these symptoms may be part of the grief reaction. However, if they persist or are causing worry, consult your doctor for a check up.

Helping Yourself Through Grief

To begin working through your grief you must be open to the feelings you are experiencing rather than trying to deny them because you think you should be strong or that you should not express emotions.

You may find your feelings of anger, guilt or relief particularly distressing but it is important to remember these feelings are normal and as much a part of grief as your other emotional reactions. Talk through your feelings with people you trust.

Don't be frightened by the intensity of the pain you may be feeling. When someone dies who was an important part of your life you are mourning not only for the person who has died but also for the hopes, plans and expectations you had with and for that person that will now be unfulfilled.

Grief can absorb all your energy and can affect all areas of your life. Grief can be a long process and there is no fixed time in which you should expect to feel better.

Gradually, the intensity of the pain will lessen as you work through your grief and you will begin to look forward to the future with hope.

death may experience regret and guilt. They need reassurance that these feelings are common to many people who are bereaved.

Some adolescents cope with death by suppressing their emotions and may appear withdrawn. It is common for adolescents to seek support outside the family. They may also be reluctant to talk to you about the death in case this upsets you. Give them opportunities to talk. Although they may appear grown up, this is a time of insecurity



and they need extra support and reassurance. It is important to include them in decisions and respect their feelings and wishes. Try not to over burden them with the difficulties you are facing or expect them to take on too many responsibilities. If you are concerned about your adolescent's reactions and behavior following a death, contact the school counselor, youth minister or your doctor.

Stories about the person who has died, going to a special place or saying special prayers are all concrete ways of helping children grieve. It is often through these types of activities and through play rather than by talking that children express grief.

As with younger children, five to twelve year olds may be withdrawn, aggressive or prone to tantrums following the death of someone close. They may also have disturbing dreams or nightmares. They may complain of headaches or tummy aches or be anxious about leaving you, for example when going to school or on holidays. Clear explanations about the cause of death and involvement in funeral and remembrance services can help children adjust to the death. You will also help by maintaining normal routines and rules and reassuring them that they are still loved and will be cared for by you.

Adolescents (12-18 year olds):

The adolescent's experience of grief, especially as they get older, is similar to that of adults. A sense of desertion, feelings of anger, loneliness, yearning for the dead person and physical symptoms are all common. However their grief will be influenced by the many changes of adolescence such as becoming independent from their family and establishing their own identity. They may have had a stormy relationship with the person who has died and following the

Here are some suggestions that may help you through your grief.

It helps to talk about the person who has died and about how their death is affecting you.

Don't distance yourself from people. It is good to spend time with people who care about you. Don't assume they know exactly what your needs are. Let them know how you are feeling and accept their support. Give yourself time. Do not have unrealistic expectations of yourself.

Don't compare yourself to others and how they have coped with their loss. Grief comes and goes, expect to have good and bad days.

Don't over extend yourself by taking on too many new responsibilities; these are best shared among a number of people.

Where possible, don't make major changes in your life during this time. If you must, discuss them with people you trust.

Don't rely on alcohol or drugs to make you feel better.

Take time for yourself. Do things you enjoy. Get plenty of rest and try to eat well. Exercise can help to work off stress and may help you sleep.

You may find that keeping a diary of your thoughts and feelings can help. There are many books available on bereavement which can help you understand what you are going through. Bereavement counseling or joining a bereavement group may also help you work through your grief.

It can help to understand that birthdays, anniversaries or other special times can bring up the painful feelings you thought you had overcome.

Don't feel guilty about having good times. Plan things you enjoy and to which you can look forward.

**Guidelines for
Caring Family
and Friends
of the
Grieving Person**



I will need you to just listen to me whatever I may be saying, and to accept me however I may be acting.

I do not need your advice right now; I need your supportive listening.

When I ask you to listen to me I need you to not say that I shouldn't feel this way

what happens at the funeral and reassurance about who will take care of them will usually help. Young children don't always have the words to explain what they are feeling and may become clingy, withdrawn or express upset through tantrums or destructive behavior. Being open with your children and maintaining the usual rules and routines will help during this time of upheaval and upset.

Five to twelve years:

From about age of five, children gradually begin to understand more about death. As they get older they can understand that death is permanent and that the dead person does not move, talk, breathe, eat and so on. They may be particularly interested in the biological aspects of death, for example, what caused the death and what happens when the person is buried or cremated.

As children of this age can have very active imaginations, it is important to truthfully explain the cause of death in terms they can understand. As with younger children, the words "dead" and "died" should be used and phrases such as "has gone away" or "passed away" should be avoided. When explaining burial and cremation, emphasize that it is only the body which is put in the ground or is burnt and that the person cannot feel anything.

caregiver. Plenty of cuddles, comfort and familiar toys are also important.

Two to five years:

Young children sense when adults are upset. Your first instinct will probably be to protect young children from sadness. However, not telling them about what has happened or sending them away to neighbors or friends without explanation will cause confusion and insecurity.

Children in this age group cannot fully understand the permanence of death. They may confuse death with sleeping or being away and may search for the missing person. They may repeatedly ask for example "when is Daddy coming home?" even though you have explained that when someone dies they are gone forever. You will need to be consistent in your answers to questions about the death. Children of this age need to hear the same information over and over.

Younger children may think that they did something to cause the person to die or that the death is a punishment for something they did wrong. Children may also have worries about who will care for them, particularly when a parent has died. They may have fears that other members of their family may also die. Short, straightforward explanations of what caused the death,

- that is trampling on my fragile feelings. Rejecting my feelings is rejecting me.

I am not helpless during this time of loss and grieving. I may be discouraged, and faltering but not helpless. Doing something that I can and should be doing for myself contributes to my fears and feelings of inadequacy plus increases my sense of dependency.

Please share with me your positive memories and experiences of my loved one, even if it makes me cry. This is good for me.

My feelings and awkward moments will make sense to you when you understand that this is how I am feeling, no matter how irrational they may seem to you.

There are no magic words you could say, so relax and just let me be the grieving person I need to be.

Allow me some "space" if I ask, but don't stay away too long. I am not rejecting you but simply have a heart and mind too full for words.

Prayer works wonderfully for the grieving person – God is my great listener, and your prayers too bring me hidden healing.

HELPING PEOPLE GRIEVE

Do's

- **Do let your genuine caring, emotions and concern show freely.**
- **Do be available to listen, run errands, help with the children or any other felt need that will be supportive help for the grieving person.**
- **Do say you are sorry about what happened to their loved one and about their pain.**
- **Do allow the grieving person to express as much grief as they are feeling at the moment and are willing to share.**
- **Do talk about the special endearing qualities of the person they have lost.**
- **Do give special attention to the extended members of the family at the funeral, and in the months to come. They are hurting also just as the grieving person.**

Children's concentration in school is usually affected because of the many changes with which they are coping. Talk with your child regularly about how things are going at school and keep in touch with their teacher.



**Children's Reactions to Death
According to Age**

Under two years:

It is generally accepted that children younger than two years do not understand the meaning of death. However, even very young children can display anxiety and become upset when someone close to them suddenly disappears. Babies and toddlers may be cranky and clingy during this time. Toddlers may become upset or subdued and uninterested in their surroundings. The most important thing for very young children is to ensure continuity in their usual daily routines and the presence of one main

ent's grief and for this reason may not talk about the person who has died in case they cause further upset. If this is happening you should talk to them about the person so that they can express their feelings.

- Children sometimes feel that they did something which caused the death. Explain the cause of death and that it had nothing to do with things they said or did. Perhaps, when a child's brother or sister has died, the child may have said such things as "I wish you were dead" and may now feel that this in some way caused the death.
- Children may display regressive behavior. It is common for children to react to stress by reverting to an earlier stage of development, for example, thumb sucking and bed-wetting. Children may also become aggressive following a death. This may have to do with pent up feelings of anger and frustration. Most of these are temporary. However, if you become worried about your child's behavior, consult your doctor, public health nurse, social worker or the child's teacher.
- Returning to school may be particularly difficult for a child. They may be worried about who has been told and what they should say to other children. Help them to prepare a simple and honest explanation of what has happened.
- Sometimes children are teased or can be hurt by insensitive remarks.

Don'ts

- **Don't avoid the grieving person because of your own awkwardness or sense of helplessness.**
- **Don't allow your own grief for the loss of the person to cause you to avoid the grieving person**
- **Don't say "I know how you feel."**
- **Don't offer solutions of replacement to them (they can always have another child or get married again).**
- **Don't avoid using the deceased person's name because it may cause them to cry. Crying is a normal, healthy reaction of loss.**
- **Don't try to offer a positive reason for the death of the person.**



Normal Grief Responses

Most people who suffer a loss, experience one or more of the following:

Initially, denial of the loss along with feelings of shock and numbness. "I can't believe he is gone!"

Enormous feelings of sadness, sorrow, emptiness and loss of meaning as well as purpose in life.

Restless activity yet difficulty concentrating. Aimless wandering, unfinished tasks, forgetfulness.

Idealized memories of the deceased person along with intense preoccupation with the life of the loved one.

Strong need to remember, relive, tell and retell memories of the loved one, often of the event and experiences related to, or associated with the death.

Insomnia, frequent dreams about the loved one, sometimes of nightmarish quality.

know that the death is an open subject and that they can ask questions and talk about worries as they arise.

- Involving children in the services and funeral may help them feel included and make the death more real for them. Make sure each child is looked after by a specific person who knows them. Children can feel very isolated and forgotten at funerals. It is important to give children choices and not to force them to do anything they are uncomfortable doing. Prepare children beforehand should they wish to see the body of the person who has died or attend the funeral.
- Children may ask the same questions many times. Although this may be difficult for you, it is their way of trying to understand what has happened.
- Maintain usual routines as much as possible. The death of someone close, especially a parent, may leave children feeling insecure and worried about who will take care of them. Comfort them and reassure them that you love them and will take care of them.
- Children learn from adults how to deal with death. Encourage the child to talk about feelings and share with them that you are also sad. It is okay to cry in front of children but explain why you are upset, as they can feel very helpless when they see an adult upset.
- Children can be very aware of their par-

sicknesses, otherwise the child may be fearful that all illness results in death. When telling a child about a death the words "dead" or "died" should be used. Phrases such as "has gone away" or "passed away" may be confusing for young children who can be very literal. They may be under the impression that the person is alive elsewhere or will return. Death should not be equated with sleep. Such explanations may result in the child being fearful of bedtime or of going to sleep.

- Keep explanations short, simple and truthful. They may need to be repeated many times. It might be useful for example to say to the younger child "Daddy was very sick. It was a big sickness, not like having a cold. The doctors and nurses could not make him better even though they tried very hard. Daddy's body could not work anymore so he died. Being dead doesn't hurt". Your explanation will also depend on the questions asked by the child.
- It is best to tell all the children together. Gather them close to you and use language they can understand. Afterwards, it may help to spend some time alone with each child.
- It is difficult to predict how children will react to bad news. They may cry, ask questions matter of factly, be silent or run out of the room. The most important thing is to be honest and open and to listen to what the child is saying. In this way, the child will

Difficulty with eating; either increased or decreased appetite.

Overwhelming, uncontrollable need to cry, often at unexpected or awkward times.

Identification with the deceased person, sometimes assuming traits and mannerisms of the deceased.

Selective sharing about our feelings of loss, no matter how desperate we are, to protect others who seem uncomfortable around us.

A sense of feeling the deceased person present in the room or nearby.

Tightness in the throat, stomach or chest pain, shortness of breath, a need for sighing deep and often, and an empty feeling in the abdomen, decreased muscle strength, increased weariness, exhaustion and lack of energy.

Children and Bereavement

Many people worry about what to tell children and how to help them when someone close to them dies. Children's reactions to death depend on their age and stage of development. However, children, even the very young, often understand much more than adults may realize. Children's grief differs from adults in that it is sporadic - your child may be upset one moment and a few moments later go out to play. This is quite normal. The following suggestions may help you when discussing the death of someone close with your child, and in responding to their grief. You may find this hard because of your own distress. Ask for support from family or friends who are close to you or your child.



Ways to Help Children When Someone Close Dies

- When a death is expected, prepare children beforehand. This should be done by the person or people closest to them. Let them know gradually what is happening, for example "the doctors and nurses are trying very hard to make Mommy better but they don't think she will get better". Allow them to ask questions in their own time. They may ask directly if the person is going to die. Answer them as truthfully as possible. Help them express their worries and fears. You could say something like, "we are all very sad that Mommy is dying. Sometimes we feel angry and scared". This may help children talk about what they feel. Explain to them that it is nobody's fault that the person is dying, that it is because she / he is very sick. Most importantly, reassure them that you love them and will be there to care for them.
- When a death is sudden children should learn about it as soon as possible and should be told by a parent or someone very close to them.
- Over simplified or inappropriate explanations will increase the child's fear and uncertainty about what is happening. Explanations such as "Daddy was sick and has gone to heaven" or "Granny went to sleep and died" may lead to confusion. The child will need an explanation that there are different types of sickness, e.g. "little" and "big"