



# Supporting Loved Ones Through Grief

LifeCare Memos® Messages of Compassion

She wept each night.

Those were the most difficult times for me as I would lie awake listening to Lynn cry herself to sleep. Lynn, a foster daughter staying in my home, had just lost her mother (and the last of her family) prematurely to multiple sclerosis and pneumonia. She was orphaned—her loss and circumstances heartbreaking.

*Although assured that her mother was in heaven, Lynn's mom was gone – along with the hopes and dreams of sharing future milestones and dreams like her graduation, musical accomplishments, and some day her wedding and her own family. Little could change the reality that she would go through life alone. I felt inadequate as I comforted her and continued to ask the question, "What can I do?"*

## **A Painful Emotion**

Grief is the most painful emotion a person will ever experience—whether its cause is the death of a loved one, divorce, losing a friend through broken relationships, a loved one who moves away, losing one's home or other valuable possessions, or losing the hope of a dream.

Our society considers talking about death and grief as "taboo"—making it one of the most difficult variables in processing that grief. As we seek to shelter our grieving loved ones, we hesitate discussing the subject, avoiding it so we don't remind them of their pain.

## **Grief With Hope**

Helping others through the grieving process is difficult, as we (being human) cannot take away another's anguish. But as believers we grieve with hope.

*"I want you to know what will happen to the Christians who have died so you will not be full of sorrow like people who have no hope. For since we believe Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus comes, God will bring back with Jesus, all the Christians who have died" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14).*

We can support our loved ones through their grief. As believers we can provide a Christ-centered hope and biblical encouragement. As *"ambassadors of Christ"* (II

Corinthians 5:19), we display God's care through our words and actions as we are guided by the Holy Spirit. As you comfort your loved one, ask God to provide you with the words to say.

## ***The Grieving Process***

Healthy grieving follows a natural course over time, a process that can last one to three years. Unexpected or premature deaths often require additional time to process. Each individual considers their grief a unique experience, with its own intensity, phases and resolution.

The grieving process follows a cycle consisting of six phases:

- Shock & Denial
- Anger (anger expressed outwardly)
- Depression (anger expressed inwardly)
- Bargaining
- Sadness
- Forgiveness – Resolution and Acceptance

These phases may overlap one another and one may last longer than another does. As healing occurs, individuals may repeat any given phase.

## ***Suggestions***

Here are some suggestions for helping a friend or family member through the grief process:

**1) Offer your quiet, supportive presence.** If you don't know what to say, that's all right. Don't say anything. Just be there with a hug or a squeeze of the hand.

**2) Encourage the grieving person to talk about the loss.** Invite the individual to share memories, whether happy or sad.

**3) Listen non-judgmentally.** Don't be shocked by anything the individual shares—even anger or guilt. Do not say, "You shouldn't say that" or "You shouldn't feel that way."

**4) Encourage the individual to remain connected with a support system** (church, Bible study, grief support groups or classes).

**5) Encourage the individual to maintain healthy routines and functionings:** friendships, diet, exercise, activities, personal hygiene, and spiritual pursuits.

**6) Pray with that person.** Pray in brief, simple, authentic statements, not lofty religious-sounding phrases.

**7) Be there for your friend or family member over the long haul**, not just during the first few days or weeks. Many grieving people hear the words, “If you need anything, just call me.” But people who are grieving will not call you. You need to call them. Be proactive in ministering to the needs of people who are grieving.

## **God Cares**

God does care for the hurting. Listen to the words of these verses of Scripture.

Psalm 34:18

*“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”*

Matthew 5:4

*“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”*

Psalm 23:4

*“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”*

Joshua 1:9

*“...Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”*

Shawwna Schmidt, 050500

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## **LifeCare Memos<sup>®</sup>**

When experiencing the stresses of life, people need support. The Psalmist needed that support and found it when he turned to God. He said, *“Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one **cares for my life**. I cry to you, O LORD; I say, ‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living’”* (Psalm 142:4-5).

**LifeCare Memos** are designed as messages of compassion that integrate biblical guidelines for emotional and spiritual well-being. Topics focus on various life-care issues and address them from the perspective of Scripture.