Supporting Individuals with Developmental Disabilities

By Vicki Jackson, MSW, LISW-S

Individuals with Developmental Disabilities (DD), like all people, experience loss throughout their lives. In addition to death, these losses can include the illness of the caregiver/parent which requires a change in living arrangements and less contact with the parent. Individuals in group homes experience loss when the staff changes, when privacy and daily routines change, or when their roommates or other residents become ill or die.

Persons with DD can be unprepared to deal with these losses. The understanding of the concept of death and its permanence will vary. It is difficult to assess how those with severe to profound impairments experience the loss. And while persons with mild to moderate disabilities may not fully grasp the concept of death, they clearly feel the grief reactions associated with it.

Here are some ways to help the person with DD who is grieving:

- Be honest, direct, and involve the individual. Tell him/her about the death in appropriate language. Choose the right setting and include a supportive colleague to share the news.
- Be present, listen, encourage expression of emotions. Do not force the individual to talk: it may take some time for the news to sink in. Convey the news again if there is a need. Allow the individual to express intense emotions – these will lessen over time.
- Reassure the individual that they are not alone and will be supported.
- Pay attention to non-verbal behaviors – there can be changes in eating, sleeping, motivation, socializing, irritability or complaints of illness.
- Recall how the individual has handled losses in the past. What family supports have helped? The use of picture books, art, music, or exercise can help to express feelings.
- Minimize change. Keep routines as consistent as possible.
- Respect and promote display of pictures. Help the person choose important mementoes. Remember holidays, birthdays, anniversaries.
- Emphasize to caregivers in the home or residential setting the variability of the grief process.

Everyone needs support to grieve in their own way, in their own time. If we can be of help to individuals with DD, their families and residential caregivers, please call the bereavement center.
When someone you love becomes a memory, the memory becomes a treasure.

— AUTHOR UNKNOWN

From the EDITOR

When a loved one dies, being surrounded by their belongings can be both a treasure and a source of stress. What is the best thing to do with all this stuff? And when do you make these decisions?

Do you toss these things in a dumpster, donate to your local charity, save them for other people, for yourself or sell it? And if you decide to keep something, what do you do with it?

One misguided ground rule of grief is that you must get rid of belongings immediately. Well-meaning family and friends may try to “help” by quickly going through the deceased’s belongings and packing them up to be discarded. This will only add to the grief. In reality, many belongings of a loved one can bring great comfort to the one who is grieving.

Our loved one’s belongings often hold special memories. “Repurposing” items by turning them into artwork can help us honor and celebrate their lives as well as keep our memories alive. While it may be difficult to cut, snip and refashion these precious items, with patience and a little creativity they can be turned into a lasting keepsake.

Mosaics out of china, quilts and teddy bears from clothing, new trinkets from old jewelry and wall art to house keepsakes are a few ideas to create new and lasting memories. For more ideas, please visit my blog.

Going through your loved one’s personal possessions is part of the healing process. It can be both comforting and overwhelming. Take your time. Be thoughtful and if there are other family members, include them in your discussions before starting any project.

With comfort and support,

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Visit The Bereavement Center’s Blog at:
hospicewr.org/bereavement-center-blog

Visit our Online Discussion Groups at:
hospicewr.org/discussions/grief

Please “like” us on Facebook:
Facebook.com/ESPBCenter
The Vista Walk and Tribute Walks

Remember Your Loved One

The gardens at David Simpson Hospice House and Ames Family Hospice House offer beautiful outdoor spaces for meditation and reflection. We invite you to add your own memory to the Vista Walk on the eastside or to the Tribute Walk in Westlake by purchasing a paving brick and writing your own personal dedication. For more information, please call the Development Team at 855.475.0245 or visit our tribute page online at tributes.hospicewr.org.

By providing education on the normal grief process and offering tools to help students cope with and express their feelings, the immediate response helps teachers and students understand that they are not alone. They can more quickly return to productive educating and learning, and begin to heal. After the initial response, many schools invite the counselors back to lead follow-up activities such as on-site grief support groups and classroom presentations.

The grief responses of children and adolescents vary depending on their developmental stage and the specific situation. If unresolved, grief can become the underlying cause of high-risk behaviors in the future. It is very important to answer a child’s questions simply and honestly. Sometimes, though, they don’t know how to put their emotions into words. Art projects can be very effective at helping students of all ages process their feelings and express them to a trusted adult.

The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center is grateful for continued grant support, which makes it possible for us to maintain the capacity to provide proactive consultation and grief education, immediate crisis response, and follow-up support services to students and adults in our school communities.

In April, Hospice of the Western Reserve announced that its 2015 School Crisis Response Program received a combined total of $27,500 in grant funding from The Pentair Foundation and the Ridgecliff Foundation. Both foundations have provided annual support since 2007. This continuity enables the bereavement center to develop deep staff expertise and strong, trusting relationships with area schools.

In a typical year, we provide immediate crisis support to 1,000 students and 250 adults. In addition to providing support following the natural death of a student, faculty member or other individual within the school community, we also help schools when they must respond to suicides or sudden, violent and traumatic deaths.

School crisis response is a priority for us. The bereavement center’s grief counselors are trained to help meet the unique circumstances of each incident. Responses are carefully planned in close coordination with the school’s staff to meet the needs of the impacted school community. Our trained and experienced counselors arrive at the school, ready to help – whether it is to meet with the teachers, present to a classroom of students, lead an interactive session with a small group, or counsel individuals.

SCHOOL CRISIS
Response Program

By Diane Snyder Cowan, MA, MT-BC, CHPCA
MASSAGE THERAPY
Providing Comfort Through Touch
Stress is a normal part of life. As you move along grief’s journey, you may face many challenges. Massage therapy is a tool useful in helping to cope with stress, anxiety and fatigue. To schedule an appointment, call Felicia Dunlop at 216.486.6335. All appointments will be held at The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center.

Basic Fees: $25 for 30 minutes $50 for 60 minutes

YOGA MATTERS
Give yourself the gift of time and attention. The practice of Yoga helps you tune into yourself and take care of your physical, emotional and spiritual needs. Classes held at Hospice of the Western Reserve Lakeshore Campus. For more information please call 216.486.6838.

On-going Yoga Class designed for caregivers & bereaved.
Wednesday, 5:30 to 6:45 p.m.
Fee: $40/month or $12 Drop-in (sliding scale fee available)

Bereavement Support Groups
Unless otherwise noted, our support groups are open to anyone who has had a loved one die. Groups are subject to change. Call to verify time and location.

Adult Support Groups

CIRCLE OF HOPE SERIES
Ashtabula Office
Thursdays, October 1 – October 22, 5:00 to 6:30 p.m.
Susan Hamme 440.997.6619

The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center
Wednesdays, October 7 – November 11, 10:00 to 11:30 a.m.
Diana Battles 216.486.6364

Lakeshore Campus
Mondays, September 21 – October 26, 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.
Tensie Holland 216.383.3741

Lakewood Office
Mondays, October 5 – November 9, 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.
Judy Beckman 216.383.2222 ext. 1114

Mentor Office
Tuesdays, September 15 – October 20, 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.
Lisa Florjancic 216.383.2222 ext. 1052

Warrensville Heights Office
Tuesdays, September 15 – October 20, 2:30 to 4:00 p.m.
Vicki Jackson 216.383.2222 ext. 1197

HOPEFUL HEARTS
A monthly grief support group for anyone age 60 and over who has experienced the death of someone special in the past two years.
Holy Spirit Family Center
410 Lear Road, Avon Lake
4th Tuesday of the month, 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.
JoDee Coulter 216.383.2222 ext. 1301

WHO AM I?
Grief challenges us to take a new look at our roles in life. In these weekly groups you will rediscover personal interests, explore new opportunities and identify support systems and tools to help you through. Come brainstorm, share and discover new ideas and resources with the group. There will be independent assignments most weeks. Registration is required.
Mentor Office
Four Tuesdays, October 6 – October 27, 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.
Karen Kincaid 216.486.6973

Warrensville Office
Four Wednesdays, October 7–October 28, 3:00 to 4:30 p.m.
Mary Murphy 216.454.0399

CIRCLE OF HOPE: Art Therapy Edition
A six-week art and educational support class for adults who have had a loved one die.
The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center
Wednesdays, October 21–November 25, 10:00 a.m. to noon.
Mollie Postotnik 216.486.6544 or mpostotnik@hospicewr.org

HOPE & HEALING
An on-going monthly support group for grieving adults. Registration is not required. Please call facilitator for more information.

Ashtabula Office
1st Wednesday of the month, 10:00 to 11:30 a.m.
Susan Hamme 440.997.6619

Lakeshore Campus
3rd Monday of the month, 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.
April Ratcliff 216.383.3782

Mentor Office
1st Tuesday of the month, 10:00 to 11:00 a.m.
Lisa Florjancic 216.383.2222 ext. 1052

PARENT LOSS - Monthly
A monthly support group for adults adjusting to life after the death of one or both parents.

Lakewood Office
2nd Tuesday of the month, 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.
Judy Beckman 216.383.2222 ext. 1114

PARENTS TOGETHER - Monthly
A monthly support group for parents who have experienced the death of an adult child.

Warrensville Heights Office
2nd Thursday of the month, 2:30 to 4:00 p.m.
Vicki Jackson 216.383.2222 ext. 1197
**WOMEN’S WORKSHOP**

For women who have experienced the death of a partner, significant other, or spouse. Come for discussion, support and education. Registration is required.

**Lakewood Office**
Tuesday, September 15, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.
Judy Beckman 216.383.2222 ext. 1114

**MINDFUL GRIEVING**

Open group, meeting monthly, for grieving adults who have experienced a loss more than six months ago. Participants in this group will learn body, mind, emotional, and relational practices to understand and come to peace with loss. Comfortable clothes are suggested. Refer to Sameet Kamur’s *Grieving Mindfully* and *Mindfulness for Prolonged Grief*.

**Warrensville Heights Office**
3rd Thursday of the month, 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.
Mary Murphy 216.383.2222 ext. 1197

**HOPE FOR THE HOLIDAYS**

An adult bereavement group providing techniques, dialogue and support for those grieving through the holiday season. Register by November 17.

**Mentor Office**
Saturday, November 21, 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.
Lisa Florjancic 216.383.2222 ext. 1052

**“To Be Known”**

**INFANT LOSS SUPPORT GROUP**

A six-week group for parents who missed the opportunity to know their child due to death in utero or within the first year of life. Join us to “To Be Known” with others who can share in your sorrow, questioning and healing. Registration is required.

**Wednesdays, October 7 & 21, November 4 & 18, December 2 & 16, 7:15 to 8:45 p.m.**

Call for location. Mindy Stewart 216.916.5520

**Children & Family Support Groups**

**KIDZ ART:**

**STAMP AND COLOR**

Kids (ages 6 and up), bring your family members along for this workshop. What similarities do you have with your loved one? What hobbies did you have in common? Stamp and color your similarities and your individualities. Light refreshments provided.

**Westlake Center for Community Services**
29694 Center Ridge Road, Westlake, 44145
Tuesday, November 10, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

**The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center**
Tuesday, November 17, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

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Healing Arts Workshops provide grieving people with a creative outlet for their grief and are open to the community. No art experience is necessary. Call Mollie Postotnik at 216.486.6544 or email her at mpostotnik@hospicewr.org to register no later than four days in advance of workshop date. Suggested $5.00 donation for supplies.

**WEAVING MEMORIES**
Using small pieces of driftwood or twigs, yarn, strips of cloth, wire and ribbon, weave together memories of your loved one. You may bring your own pieces of wood or twigs, twelve inches or less in length, or use the ones provided. Strips of your loved one’s clothing may also be incorporated into the piece.
**Westlake Center for Community Services**
29694 Center Ridge Road, Westlake, 44145
**Tuesday, September 15, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.**
**Warrensville Heights Office**
**Wednesday, September 16, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.**
**The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center**
**Thursday, September 24, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.**

**ART FOR RELAXATION:**
*Autumn Leaves*
Did your loved one have a favorite tree? Did you take walks in the fall crunching through the leaves? Using the shapes of real leaves, participants will create autumn leaves out of paper clay and paint them with watercolors.
**The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center**
**Thursday, October 15, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.**
**Westlake Center for Community Services**
29694 Center Ridge Road, Westlake, 44145
**Tuesday, October 20, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.**
**Warrensville Heights Office**
**Wednesday, October 21, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.**

**LGBTQ ART THERAPY EVENT:**
*Grief Journey Map*
This event is for members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, Queer Community who have experienced the death of a loved one. What does your grief journey look like? Looking at the losses of loved ones in a visual way can sometimes reveal previously hidden insights about the effects of grief on one’s life. Using symbols, colors, and representative drawings, participants will use markers to depict their journey of loss.
**The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center**
**Tuesday, October 27, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.**

**GRATITUDE COLLAGE**
A collage is a work of art made from assembling photos, newspaper clippings, ribbons, handmade papers, and other found objects. Participants will create a collage that depicts gratitude for their loved ones and their lives together.
**Warrensville Heights Office**
**Wednesday, November 11, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.**
**The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center**
**Thursday, November 19, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.**
**Westlake Center for Community Services**
29694 Center Ridge Road, Westlake, 44145
**Tuesday, November 24, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.**

**SAVE THE DATE**
**HOLIDAY FAMILY NIGHTS:**
*Comfort Bags*
In this workshop, individuals and families can paint and decorate a large or small canvas bag. Please bring an apron or wear old clothes as we will be using fabric dyes. Light refreshments provided.
**Westlake Center for Community Services**
29694 Center Ridge Road, Westlake, 44145
**Tuesday, December 8, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.**
**Warrensville Heights Office**
**Wednesday, December 9, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.**
**The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center**
**Thursday, December 10, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.**

**HOLIDAY FAMILY NIGHT**
Join us for a special evening using art to memorialize your loved ones during the holiday season. Materials and light refreshments provided.
**Ashtabula Office**
**Thursday, December 10, 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.**
Susan Hamme 440.997.6619
A sad child whose parent had died asks, “Why is life so hard?” It’s a good question and one that old and young people ask. When someone important to us dies, it seems that everything is hard. It seems that we are the only ones in the world whose life is hard.

Here’s a story: A mother visited a wizard. Her child had died, and she asked the wizard to bring her child back to life. The wizard told her, “Knock on the door of every house in the village. If you can find one home where there has not been death, I will bring your child back to life.”

She loved her child so much that she would do anything to have her child live again. For days, she went from door to door in the village, asking the wizard’s question. At every home, however, there had been a death a long time ago or a death not so long ago. She finally went back to the wizard, “I could not find one house where a family had not been touched by death.” “Exactly,” said the wizard. He looked at her with eyes full of love and kindness. “You are sad now, but one day you will remember your child without sadness and remember the joy she brought you. I can promise you that will happen to you, if you use your wise, brave heart.” The mother accepted her sadness and the wizard’s words.

Here is a little project to help you remember the wizard’s words: Draw a picture of a big red heart. Around that heart write the ways you can keep your own heart wise and brave. What you can do is called “coping”. It includes things like talking, exercising, drawing, singing, listening to music, deep breathing from your belly, writing stories and letters, making jewelry, gardening, reading, sports...get the idea? Keep adding to your “heart supports” as new ideas come up. Post the picture where you can see it.

Remember you are not alone in your sadness. There are people in your life who can listen to you and help you through the hard times. Open your heart and talk to people you feel safe and comfortable with. Your sadness will not stay forever. Life will become easier. And you will begin to remember your important person with a loving smile.
SECOND FIRSTS: Live, Laugh and Love Again
By Christina Rasmussen

Christina Rasmussen, a therapist and crisis intervention counselor, was 34 years old and had two small children when her husband died of cancer. Dedicated to “All the unborn Life Starters,” she wrote Second Firsts to help others deal with the emotional and physical pain of grief.

Rasmussen leads the reader through five transitional stages, referring to them as “Launchpads,” each treated in a separate chapter: 1. Get Real; 2. Plug-In; 3. Shift; 4. Discover; 5. Reenter Life. Each section provides practical processes for the reader to work through in their own grief journey. Knowledgeable in neuroscience, the author also talks about the brain and how it reacts and responds to grief.

Rasmussen recounts her own experiences through the five “Launchpads,” as well as the experiences of others with whom she has worked. She concludes each chapter by writing a letter to the reader, a “Message in a Bottle.” These are thought-provoking summaries, intended to give hope to individuals who are grieving.

Second Firsts is a very user-friendly book. Although it primarily focuses on the death of a spouse at a young age, the author includes references to divorce as well. A useful list of recommended readings and resources for those coping with loss concludes the chapters. As Rasmussen states in her introduction, “I know you are afraid to get hurt again. But I also know that you are not meant to grieve forever.”