

Grieve and Stay Well

Rethinking Wellness for the Workplace

by Kip Ingram, Director of Bereavement Care

For those of you who have experienced a significant loss, or worked with a colleague who has, hearing encouragements to wellness can feel like an unattainable burden. Being invited to “get away” for our optimal well-being, we’ve all seen the glossy magazine pictures of smiling, vibrant faces situated at dazzling, exotic retreat locales. Doing well in such a setting seems both inspiring and effortless, leaving the impression that with such opportunities we could finally reach a place of wholeness. If wellness means easygoing lifestyle choices which continuously yield blissful experiences and peak productivity, then it’s hard to see how the experience of grief relates to such an ideal.

Grief can challenge our efforts at consistency, diminish our energy for doing things and overwhelm our experiences with difficult feelings. It seems miles away from popular images of wellness. And yet, grief is a natural part of the human journey and has been from our earliest beginnings. Because we care deeply for the people around us, grief is the form which love takes when we lose someone significant in our lives. Is there a way to reconcile grief and wellness by enlarging our sense of what it means to be well so that it takes account of the grief experience? It would surely mean that wellness is less about striving for happiness and wholeness and more about coping with what life brings us, more about finding good ways to bear the feelings of sadness and incompleteness after a loss.

In order to enlarge our understanding of wellness and make it more humanly realistic,

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Montgomery HOSPICE

Grieving With Kids

by Isabel Tom, Program Manager, Montgomery Hospice Center for Learning

On any given day, I am sure to hear someone call “Mommy” hundreds of times. Sometimes it comes from three different directions and without a doubt it is followed by chatty conversation, spilled milk, sticky hands, sibling conflict, requests for sweet treats and more. Over the past six years, I have spent much of my time caring for and chasing three young children. I have also spent the past eight years grieving the deaths of three family members near and dear to my heart.

If you’ve experienced a loss yet you still have to hold down the fort, you are not alone. One of the benefits in working at Montgomery Hospice is that I get to be around some amazing bereavement counselors who have walked with me through my own losses and taught me a lot about grief. Grief is hard. And then there are children. Here’s what I’ve learned about grieving with kids. May it help you as you walk this journey to healing:

It’s normal to feel torn.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges I’ve found in losing someone is that when you *feel* like falling apart, you *have* to keep it together. Food still needs to be on the table. Baths still need to be given. Diapers definitely still need to be changed. And little children still want you to read every word of that long Berenstain Bears book. I’d see something that reminded me of my dad, but before my heart or mind could do some healthy wailing, someone would yell, “Mommeeee, I need



Tung Tu Photography

to go to the bathroom!” and just like that, I’d snap out of it. The responsibilities of parenting often cause you to suppress your grief, which desperately needs some time and attention.

Should you be happy or sad?

When my dad struggled with eating, I was starting to feed my second baby his first solids. When diapers were something to be considered for my grandma, my son was just about ready to get rid of them. Watching my parent/grandparents decline while also trying to cheer on my babies as they achieved milestones was an internal conflict that was both heavy and real.

It’s easy to feel alone.

People are often “with you” emotionally at the funeral. But the heaviness of grief often comes in the days, months, or maybe even years after a death. The rest of the world gets on with life fine and dandy so it can feel like everyone else has forgotten. At Montgomery Hospice, our bereavement team sends

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From Ann's Office Outreach to Community

The work of Montgomery Hospice professionals reaches deep into our community. Many do not realize that our physicians, nurses, social workers, chaplains and hospice aides drive throughout the county to care for patients in houses, assisted living facilities and nursing homes. The Montgomery Hospice Center for Learning holds regular educational events and conferences for professionals in public spaces throughout the county. Our bereavement counselors also travel, providing workshops and grief support groups in a variety of locations.

As part of their work in the community, our bereavement counselors share their

professional expertise with companies, congregations, government and civic organizations in Montgomery County. While continuing to prioritize our support for Montgomery Hospice families, we recently held a "Time to Remember" ceremony for the staff of a local restaurant who lost a coworker to an unexpected accident. We educated lawyers and staff members from an estate law firm about grief to help them better support their clients. We presented *Grief 101* to the Montgomery County Register of Wills office staff because they regularly assist family members after a loss. We spoke on *The Healing Journey of Grief* at a local retirement community, and presented topics such as *Ethical Legacies*, *Coping with the Stresses of Life*, and *Children and Grief* to other organizations.

As always, we hope to educate all of you who read Hospice Matters, including those who

live in Montgomery County and beyond. In this issue, we provide thoughts and advice for people in the workforce who are grieving, and best practice suggestions for their employers. In addition, we share a personal essay from a staff member describing her experiences doing the work of parenting after losing family members.

Being a good neighbor in the community is important to us. We are grateful to the many people who donate to Montgomery Hospice. You make it possible for us to go out into the community to care for patients and families, and to share our expertise with so many others.

Ann Mitchell
President & CEO

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we might recognize the importance of "vital coping." Such an idea would include the many ways we find our bearings and take care of ourselves after a loss. To fill out this idea, consider some of the following elements. When Montgomery Hospice bereavement counselors are talking with individuals who have recently experienced a loss, one of the early questions they often ask is about that person's eating and sleeping. These are two of the most frequently interrupted parts of someone's life at such a time and an important focus for coping. Another place of change is often a grieving person's energy level, which can be diminished during grief, and requires that a person find helpful ways of getting rest and managing reduced energy. Recognizing that we carry our grief in our bodies, it is important to attend to the kinds of self-care

and exercise a grieving person is considering. Far from being an additional burden on an already weary body, this kind of care can take many soothing and enlivening forms: getting a massage, going for a gentle walk, taking a yoga class, meeting friends around a hobby, and on and on.

Another element of vital coping is finding the appropriate rhythm for social involvement. Grieving individuals need to find their balance between going and doing and being with others, on the one hand, and allowing for low-key times just to themselves, on the other. This will be different for each person, and may change for someone over time, but it is an important part of coping with social connections while grieving. In addition, vital coping involves sorting out

the meanings of a life after a loss. When a loved one dies, a person's assumed world is abruptly challenged and changed, as one person shared after the long-term care and death of her mother, "I've thought of myself as my mother's daughter and caregiver for a long time, so who am I going to be now?" Such questions revolving around the meaning of a loss and how one adapts to a changed world are intimate, often intense, and subtly important. Taking time to allow these questions to be sorted out is essential.

Although each person's grief reactions are different, all these elements of vital coping help to enrich our sense of what well-being might mean by including the ways we deal with our losses. Given the importance of such coping, what are the implications for

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the places we work and the co-workers around us? We all have experienced or will experience the loss of a loved one, so it is important to establish a workplace where attention to wellness includes supportive measures which allow for “vital coping.” Since the 2003 study, *Grief Index: The ‘Hidden’ Annual Costs of Grief in America’s Workplace*, there has been increasing recognition of the ways in which grief can affect the workplace, from higher absences to mistakes on the job to decreased energy and focus. It would serve both individuals and companies well to offer a supportive work environment where grieving persons are compassionately upheld as part of a larger emphasis on wellness.

Wellness is less about striving for happiness and wholeness and more about coping with what life brings us, more about finding good ways to bear the feelings of sadness and incompleteness after a loss.

I offer the following suggestions as possible ways to offer support, while recognizing that each company and individual will work out such measures in unique ways.

For grieving individuals and co-workers:

- After a loss, communicate with your supervisor about how public you want the loss to be. Because each person is different, some are comforted by the fact that all of their co-workers know, some tell only a few around them, and some prefer that as few as possible are aware.
- For co-workers, gently find out when and if the grieving person wants to talk about their grief. Be non-intrusive and willing to listen without judgment. Recognize that for some, it is enough just to be at work and have a “regular” day without talking about the loss.
- Another low key way to acknowledge a co-worker’s loss is to send a thoughtful card or make a donation in their loved one’s memory.
- Don’t overreact or create unnecessary attention if a grieving colleague has a tearful moment, even many months after the loss. Emotional triggers can come at any time and do not mean that something is wrong. Sometimes, it is best to offer a tissue with some kind words, such as “this must be a tender place for you,” or “take your time, I’ll be here,” or even “would you like to step away and take a break?”
- Use your desk or workspace for pictures or mementos of loved ones. Those who grieve can often find comfort in small tokens of connection to their loved one and take comfort in sharing them with caring colleagues.
- For co-workers, make a note to remember those who have lost a loved one as time goes by, especially around big days such as holidays, anniversaries and birthdays.
- For those who grieve and those who care about them, be patient and gentle with yourself and others. Grief can be a lot of ups and downs, so be kind in the process.

For supervisors and companies:

- Provide for bereavement leave. Such a gesture signals that the company recognizes something significant has happened, and that it wants to help.
- Offer counseling support through resources provided by HR or the Employee Assistance Program or Peer Support meetings.

- Offer additional outside counseling, paid or unpaid, with referral lists of counselors and therapists.
- Create an employee leave bank where staff can donate extra hours to be used by grieving individuals when needed.
- Offer flex time to employees to work at home when they feel unable to match the typical office energy and challenges.
- If possible, reassign grieving employees away from certain projects or situations which might trigger grief episodes or complications.
- Allow for staff to take some time for getting out and walking during lunch or a break. Provide schedule flexibility during the day for staff who’d like to go to the gym.
- If possible provide an inviting space for reflective moments. Install an outside bench; plant a small garden; create a comfortable room away from the usual workspace.
- Communicate clearly with grieving persons about the supports available as well as the expectations. Work out a plan together for employee needs and return to work.
- Offer an annual ritual of remembrance for staff, allowing them to pause and acknowledge their losses from the past year.
- Schedule grief awareness education for managers, leadership and staff.

No one company or person will do all of this perfectly, but such policies and gestures provide a direction for innovative approaches to wellness in the workplace and beyond. Let’s move past the popular images of well-being in our society toward something more human and real, where grief and wellness go hand in hand.

mailings and checks up on caregivers who have lost a loved one, and they follow them 13 months after the death. One thing I loved about receiving these letters was that it made me feel like *someone* remembered.

Here's another thought. As a mom of little ones, carrying on a meaningful

conversation with another adult is already a challenge. So imagine having such intense feelings (of sadness, anger, love, regret), but not having the chance or the right time or a safe space to share them. Talking and sharing with others about your grief is often a needed part of the grieving process. With kids, however, there is barely any time (or energy) to reflect on your loss, let alone share your feelings with others.

Grief comes in the car.

Life gets busy with drop-offs, lunches, homework, and other mommy jobs, and you can often forget that you even lost someone you love. But then, for me, grief often comes in the car. I don't get much time to myself and so sometimes when I'm driving and all the kids have snoozed off, my grief catches up with me. Life may be "okay" while you do the tedious task of parenting, but when it slows down and grief comes, take those moments to cry, to remember. And know that it's okay.

Grief can affect you more than you think.

One thing that often surprises people about grief is that it can take many shapes and sizes (and it is all still very normal!) Some people get sick more often. Some get more forgetful. Some get super angry. Some have dreams of their loved ones. Some question God. Grief can cause physical, emotional, and spiritual responses,



and is no figment of your imagination! A loss changes schedules, experiences, holidays. And so you may very well start acting differently. If you mess up more often, give yourself grace. If you blow up at your kids more often, ask for forgiveness. And find ways to be kind to yourself as you slowly take time to find your new "normal."

Tears need not be hidden.

We can keep our kids at least partially in the loop when the tears come. During the times following the death of my grandma and my dad, there were surely days of tears. Friends are not always nearby when you're washing dishes, but I believe our children are God-given for all sorts of reasons, including to get us a tissue or to give a snuggle and a hug when the moments get rough. At the ages of three and five, two of my kids have already experienced two losses. As I grieve, they often walk very appropriately beside me, quite aware that life is different. When I share my tears, they unabashedly ask, "Do you miss your dad?" And for me, it's nice to have someone remember.

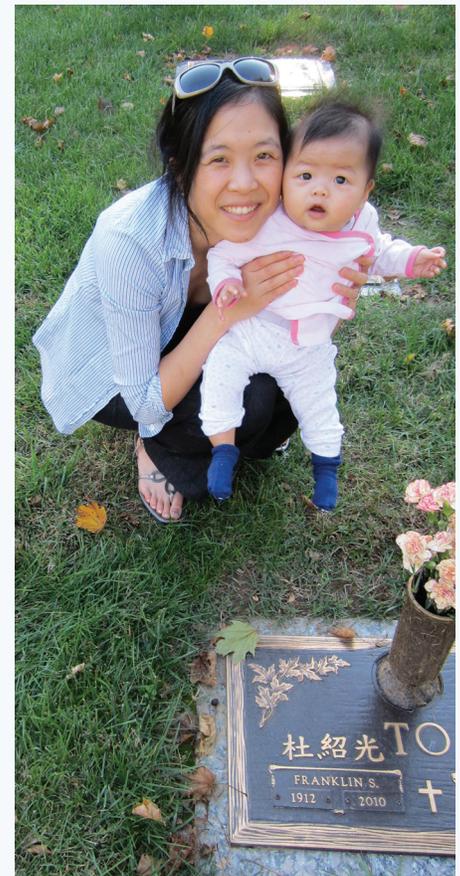
Involve your kids in remembering.

I know many people question how much they should talk to their children about the death of a loved one. If we talk about birth though, I find it just as appropriate to talk about death. Isn't it a normal part of life? And isn't grief also such a normal reaction? With each loss I have experienced, it helps me to involve my children in remembering. On the first anniversary of my dad's death, all my kids and their cousins went out to pick dandelions to surround my dad's gravestone. To this day, when they see a bright yellow dandelion, my children

pick them like fresh flowers and will bring them to me. It warms my heart and makes me remember.

"Did you know that when Goong Goong (my dad) was sick, he had a hard time breathing, but he still wanted to read to you *Playground Problem?* He loved you so much." I love to remind my kids about Dad, my grandma and my grandpa, because in sharing with them, it helps me in my healing.

If you have lost beloved children, friends, parents, grandparents, and spouses while still having to care for the rest of your family, be mindful of the stress you have experienced. Give yourself grace. And in time, we all hope for healing to happen.



photos courtesy of Tom family

Reflections by Montgomery Hospice Staff Members

Returning to work after the death of a friend or loved one can be challenging or, for some, a positive step towards healing. Each individual's experience is different. Below, some Montgomery Hospice employees reflect on what they found helpful when they returned to the workplace after a loss, and share things that they did to help themselves through the grieving process.

Marlene Bradford is the leader of the philanthropy team for Montgomery Hospice. Maude Harrison-Hudson is a professional grief counselor. Isabel Tom coordinates professional end-of-life education through the Montgomery Hospice Center for Learning.

What was helpful to you when you returned to work after the death of your loved one?

Marlene

I appreciated the flexibility to come and go, to be allowed to step away from my desk when everything felt like too much, and to work from home sometimes.

Maude

I was grateful to come back to an environment where my coworkers were sensitive, kind and warm, and understanding. They knew I was grieving and were patient and gentle with me. I had the opportunity to be patient and gentle with myself. I knew I couldn't jump back into things at the same pace that I had before.

Isabel

To me, I found that coming back to work, focusing on something else, was helpful. I told my coworkers and my supervisor what had happened so that they were aware of my situation and understood if I wasn't as productive. Knowing that grief can hit hard at certain times, I took a day off on the anniversary of the death.

What things were difficult or not helpful when you returned to work?

Maude

Some people made assumptions about what I was feeling. They didn't know that everyone is different and unique in their grief. So some would express surprise that I was back at work and make comments like, "I don't know how you can be here." That wasn't helpful. They weren't meaning to be unkind but didn't understand that imagining how they would feel might not reflect what I was experiencing.

Isabel

A difficult thing for me were the triggers. There were words or images or smells that would trigger my grief, send me back into pain. Some triggers I knew about and tried to prepare for. Others took me completely by surprise.



Maude

It is important to be aware of what is going to cause your emotions to escalate. There will be times when something reminds you of your loved one's illness or death. Certain things will cause difficult memories, feelings and emotions to resurface just as if the situation had just occurred. We find

ourselves feeling the sadness, despair, disappointment, anger at the disease, anger at God, all over again. Those feelings can be as intense as when you first felt them. The good news is that, with time, the intensity of grief softens and the intensity of those triggers soften.

What kinds of things did you do for yourself as you navigated the grief process?

Isabel

It was just hard. There were times when I thought I would be able to deal with certain meetings, certain situations, but couldn't. I learned more about myself and what I could handle and not handle. Sometimes being in the workplace was easier than being at home. I found that when I worked on my grief and essentially got all my crying done at home (and took time to mourn, remember, write and reminisce), I was less likely to be triggered in the workplace. So that's what I did—faced the grief at home, forced myself to think about it.

I also drank a lot of water and made sure to exercise.

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Marlene

I made myself a priority. I gave myself as much value as I bring for my job. I allowed myself to be vulnerable in the presence of trusted colleagues. And I found comfort in being available to listen to others who were dealing with something difficult.



At work I would step away at times; go for a brief walk, leave the office, or read something inspiring.

For me, spirituality is grounding; it puts things in perspective and is the cornerstone of my life. Spirituality can be an anchor in the midst of an emotional storm.

Maude

I talk a lot about “self-care” in my professional work, and I engage in self-care practices for myself. My personal self-care tool box includes prayer, meditation, exercise, reading, acupuncture, massage, and making sure to get enough sleep. I also practice gratitude.

While grieving at work, I would often take a break, go for a walk and focus on eating healthy.

With grief, each day is different. Don’t expect that because today is good, tomorrow will be too. Grief is up and down, like a roller coaster. Not a straight line. Can’t always control it. Need to tend to grief so that it doesn’t come out in negative ways.

What did co-workers do that was helpful?

Marlene

- Listened.
- Kept appropriate boundaries.
- Cried. Laughed. Hugged.
- Sent me unexpected emails and made unscheduled visits.
- Provided the gift of silence.

Isabel

My co-workers remembered, sent me notes, talked to me about my loved one. People who knew about my loss, what I was going through, were sensitive to what I needed and would back me up.

Maude

It was helpful and appreciated that a number of people came to the memorial service. I received unexpected overtures of compassion.

What can organizations do to be helpful in supporting their staff members?

Isabel

Organizations need paid bereavement leave. Supervisors should check in with a grieving staff member to see how they are doing, discuss creative solutions for getting work tasks done, and not add pressure by enforcing tight deadlines. They should educate themselves about grief, and know that it isn’t something that people just “get over.”

Marlene

Organizations should provide bereavement leave, and also provide work flexibility and the opportunity for their staff to adjust work hours. Organizations can provide employee assistance programs or other counseling support—and send gentle reminders that this is available. Employers should not judge their staff, or compare how one staff member’s grief compares to others. It is helpful if an employer remove all assumptions and expectations, and recognize that grief is unique.

Coming soon!

What’s Important to You?
is a new podcast offering intriguing insights on end-of-life topics.



www.montgomeryhospice.org/podcast

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Montgomery Hospice is grateful to its 2018 Corporate Partners. Donations through our Corporate Partnership program help to underwrite educational programs and other initiatives that inform county residents about our services.

Businesses and organizations interested in becoming a Montgomery Hospice Corporate Partner should contact:

Marlene Bradford, Vice President of Philanthropy
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Profit Law Firm is honored to assist Montgomery Hospice in accomplishing its mission. We hope to help the community, and we value Montgomery Hospice as a partner in doing so. As attorneys, we are personally dedicated to legacy planning and we are dedicated to supporting you and your loved ones as you navigate through obstacles.

Please visit our website at www.profitlawfirm.com or reach out to us at 301 882 3670, if you would like to speak with someone.

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Right at Home

As the owner of one of 400 global franchises of Right at Home, Lewis Myers has a personal connection with the goals of hospice and

providing the option for people to stay in their home at end of life. His grandfather spent the last several weeks of his life with his medical team attempting to prolong his life. Although his grandfather told Lew, "I've had a good life. It's time for me to go," there was no hospice benefit available and home care had not yet reached his locale. Instead of being able to honor his grandfather's wishes, the primary physician insisted on transferring his grandfather to a skilled nursing facility. He died a day later.

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For Right at Home, becoming a corporate sponsor of Montgomery Hospice was an easy decision. Montgomery Hospice has a commitment to helping people through the dying process, providing for the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of patients and their families. As a home care and assistance company, Right at Home is proud to work with Montgomery Hospice as partners assisting and guiding people on their individual journeys. We are dedicated to ensuring that our team of caregivers is trained in the hospice philosophy to provide all aspects of care needed when families are on this important journey.

Visit us at www.rightathome.net



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This has been a milestone year for the bank, as 2018 marks the company's 150th anniversary. The bank was founded shortly after the end of the Civil War by a group of local business and townspeople who saw a need for a community bank where they could place their trust—a bank that would serve the interests of its people. One hundred and fifty years later, Sandy Spring Bank remains committed to the values that have shaped who it is today. It is not about deals and transactions but rather lifelong interactions that make a difference in the lives of its clients, employees and communities.

To learn more about Sandy Spring Bank, visit www.SandySpringBank.com

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The Circle of Light Society recognizes individuals and families who have included Montgomery Hospice in their estate plans through a bequest, trust, insurance policy or other estate-planning vehicle. Individuals interested in joining the Circle of Light Society should contact Marlene Bradford, Vice President of Philanthropy, at 301 637 1874.

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The Combined Federal Campaign underwent many changes last year. **One important change impacts federal and military retirees.** Previously, they could only make a one-time, annual contribution. Now, retirees can pledge donations that will be deducted from their pensions each month.

If you do not see Montgomery Hospice listed as an option in your employer's giving campaign, you usually can designate our organization by following the campaign's instructions on how to contribute to unlisted nonprofits. You may need to write in our name and address, found on the back of this newsletter. You may also consider sending your gift directly to us or donating through our website (montgomeryhospice.org/donate).

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On behalf of all those we serve, thank you for your donations to Montgomery Hospice!

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Hospice Matters is a newsletter for family and friends of Montgomery Hospice, a non-profit organization serving residents of Montgomery County, Maryland who are bereaved or terminally ill.

Bereavement Care: free grief education for anyone who lives or works in Montgomery County

Winter Blues Workshop November 28, 6:30-8:00 pm, 1355 Piccard Drive, Rockville

Discussion about Grief and Healing December 5, 6:30-8:00 pm, 1355 Piccard Drive, Rockville

Winter Blues Workshop December 10, 1:00-2:30 pm, 1355 Piccard Drive, Rockville

Discussion about Grief and Healing January 3, 2019, 1:00-2:30 pm, 1355 Piccard Drive, Rockville

Afternoon Grief Support Group January 15, 2019, each Tuesday, 1:30-3:00 pm for six weeks, Rockville

Evening Grief Support Group January 16, 2019, each Wednesday 6:30-8:00 pm for six weeks, Rockville

Loss of a Child Support Group January 16, 2019, each Wednesday, 6:30-8:00 pm for six weeks, Rockville

Parent Loss Support Group January 17, 2019, each Thursday, 6:30-8:00 pm for six weeks, Silver Spring

Volunteer Training

March 15, 22 and 29 (2019), 9:00 am to 4:00 pm
Rockville. Apply online.

Honor and Remember People

Tree of Lights, Brookside Gardens, Wheaton,
Monday, November 19.

Visit www.montgomeryhospice.org
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