



Heart & Soul



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A Newsletter from Living With Dignity

*Providing professional counseling and support
services to individuals and families living with Cancer & AIDS*

The Emotional Journey of Cancer

To a patient and their family the experience of dealing with cancer, is like riding a roller-coaster. The difference between the two is that riding a roller-coaster is a choice; and secondly the expectations of the ride are predictable. The psychological effects of cancer arrive at the moment of diagnoses, continue through treatment

Cancer is an emotional crisis

and waxes and wanes throughout the lives of all those involved. Because there are many unknowns and so much information to learn, both the patient and family may begin to feel fearful, insecure and anxious. These feelings are very normal, but very uncomfortable. One of the most important ways to cope with these feelings is to ask questions and become knowledgeable about your condition and treatment. This will empower you and create a sense of control. Cancer creates immediate

changes to all facets of our life, and although change is part of living, we generally want and feel more secure when we are in control of those changes.

Loss of control, even for a temporary period of time, can make anyone experience fear and apprehension. This issue is very important to understand because a lot of people immediately think they are weak if they are afraid. It is nowhere written that strength in character and experiencing fear is mutually exclusive. In fact, there would be no such thing as courage if there were not fears to overcome. Accepting that your emotions are not only going to surface, but will alter your behavior and
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Weeping Willow

GRIEVING ETTIQUETTE

There are no magical formulas for grieving and mourning. Grieving is not something someone else can fix or change. It is a unique and personal experience that can not be measured or controlled. Concerned loved ones often ask what they should do to make it better for the bereaved person. The sense of helplessness in watching someone weep, be depressed, or become listless creates a sense of powerlessness for the onlooker. However, it is very simple: people who are grieving don't need you to do anything other than just be there. Especially in the early weeks of loss, comfort can be found by volunteering to prepare a meal, baby-sitting, running an errand or just being present in the same house.

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others is important to reconcile. A strong person is one who allows his/herself to be human and experience normal feelings. Cancer is an emotional crisis. The trauma and shock that a cancer diagnosis brings will subside. Once routine treatment begins the mood swings become more manageable. Joining support groups or talking with therapist are both ways to help you to feel more secure about your feelings.

To those of you who have been diagnosed and your

...cancer does not change who people are...

caregivers, I want to further emphasize that while cancer changes our lives, it doesn't change who we are as people. As a matter of fact, it can exacerbate the character flaws of a loved one. People commonly think that cancer will somehow change how people cope with their problems. Unfortunately, that is not always true. Who a person was before cancer is who they are during cancer. Yes, there are people who do have epiphanies, but it is unrealistic to expect that a person can change in the middle of a crisis.

People have images of themselves and the roles they play both in their personal and professional lives. All of this gets shaken on that roller-coaster, and it is important to understand that pride and self-esteem become extremely

sensitive issues for the person with cancer.

Cancer patients often worry about becoming a "burden" to their loved ones. That is why it is important to

Cancer is a disease that affects the whole family.

discuss openly as a family and if necessary, seek professional guidance to eliminate these worries. The changing of roles in a family can be a particularly difficult issue, especially when you have been self-reliant and autonomous. On the other hand, family members fear being overwhelmed with added responsibility, juggling children or elderly parents, etc. The resolution to these concerns is to explore what roles you can take on and those you can't. Have reasonable expectations of others and yourself and allow room for flexibility. Cancer is a disease that affects the whole family.

Crying is a necessary and healthy way to release feelings. People struggle with this because they are afraid they will "fall apart." If you don't allow yourself to cry, you will fall apart. Crying is our psyche's way of letting go. It is a natural, biological release valve that cleanses us in times of distress. Again, don't mistake this for weakness. Our tears are a way of healing the pain we are feeling inside.

SANCTUARY™



A Two-Day Retreat for Women Living With Cancer

**Wednesday and Thursday
May 16 and 17, 2001**

*8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Morristown, NJ*

This two-day retreat is specifically geared towards the emotional and physical well-being of women who are living with cancer.

Fees & Registration:

Program is free of charge to all participants. Applications for the spring retreat are now being accepted. Space will be limited. For details and registration information contact:

***Living With Dignity at
973-993-1466***

or e-mail

***cancercounseling@att.net
www.cancercounseling.org***

Grieving Etiquette continued from page 1

It is important to remember not to assume what someone may want, but to ask questions and wait for an answer. People who are grieving appreciate others who respect their boundaries and understand their silences. In doing so, you avoid awkwardness and then both parties benefit. Some people do need to isolate when they are grieving, but you can still ask if they want something. It takes at least six months after a death



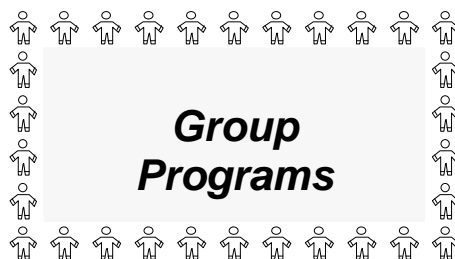
for the person who has had the loss to start making sense of their feelings. Grief therapist, like myself, don't recommend support groups until the bereaved have had enough time to sort through their feelings of loss. Understanding your role to the person who is grieving and that your acts of kindness are enough will eliminate further trauma and pain. No one can fix someone else's grief.

Death and dying are scary and uncomfortable subjects. Oftentimes people make the mistake of telling those in mourning "to get over it" or "hasn't enough time gone by." Grief is a life-long process. According to the length of the relationship and the intensity of the attachment, a person will grieve and

mourn until they find acceptance and closure. If you are uncomfortable, that is something for you to try to gain insight into, not the person who

The greatest support one can offer... is simply their sincerity and empathy

has suffered a loss. The greatest support one can offer a grieving person is simply their sincerity and empathy. People who are grieving don't want to be asked everytime you see them, how they are doing with their loss. It is perfectly okay to talk about other things. If the person who has had a loss wants to talk they will tell you. But you are nowhere obliged, nor are you being rude by not asking about their loss. People who are grieving have other things going on in their life too, and it can be more helpful to talk about those things to take a vacation from their pain.



Bereavement support is offered in the form of support groups for adults and children. The programs are designed to deal with the issues related to grief, death and dying. The adult groups are specifically geared towards in-

dividuals who have lost a loved one at least six months prior to the initial session.

The children's programs are a combination of discussion and age specific activities designed to assist each child in understanding and moving through their grief process. All programs are currently accepting registration for the next session.

SONATA™ is a bereavement support group for those individuals who have lost a loved one to a long-term illness

AVALANCHE™ is a bereavement support group for those who have lost someone through sudden death

TEDDY BEAR CLUB™ explains death, dying, grief, bereavement and mourning to children ages 5-9 years old who have lost a loved one.

KALEIDOSCOPE™ helps children 10-15 deal with the process of grief.

HEART & SOUL™ is a support group for couples touched by cancer. This program is designed to deal with the issues related to the affects on marriage, children, finances, and sexuality.

BREATHING ROOM™ This program is designed to meet the emotional needs of anyone who has been diagnosed with lung cancer.

