

FAMILY BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Social Work Department

NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2017



The Royal
Children's
Hospital
Melbourne

Welcome to the August newsletter of the Family Bereavement Support Programme. We hope that in reading the newsletters and being a part of the groups you will find connection with other parents, support and encouragement to help sustain you as you grieve for your child.

“Negotiating new relationships - new children, new friends, new partner”

The group began with introductions and sharing from each participant and then we spoke together about experiences of new relationships following bereavement.

For some grieving parents, old relationships have to be found anew. For others, existing relationships, whether friends, partners or family members, do not



always survive the onslaught of grief. In this month's group some parents shared their experiences of how their intimate partnerships had not been able to make it in the face of acute grief and loss. ***“We separated because we lost our daughter. There is a lot to juggle. It is like a grief tsunami hit me”.*** A father attending the group talked about the collapse of his

marriage following the devastating impacts of the sudden death of his daughter, the differences in the two parents' grief and his feeling that as a bloke one does not always feel "allowed to" grieve. A mother continued the discussion about grief's impact on relationships, saying **"My husband and I have very different ways of grieving. We have to work out how to navigate about our grief, how to communicate"**. Finding ways of communicating whilst carrying enormous pressure and distress, can be exhausting for many. Another group participant talked about the importance of all family members respecting each person's way and need to grieve, even if we "can't fathom" the other's pain. Another stated that although she couldn't heal her husband and



herself in their partnership, **"I have to heal me"**. The end of a partner relationship does not have to mean that separated parents cannot share significant moments and rituals and memories. For many parents, despite a final separation they are able to join together at times around anniversaries, memorial services etc., this being so important given their shared experiences as parents and the ultimate loss which only they can understand in that particular way.

Some parents whose relationships have ended in the wake of grief, have since been able to repartner. Group participants described ways in which subsequent partnerships have enriched their lives: **"It helped me to be able to "smile" again. My**



life is different now and a good different". One mother described the loss of her relationship with the father of her child but the discovery of something new in repartnering, which was a positive experience regardless of the fact that the new relationship has now finished.

The topic of "Negotiating new relationships" was also taken up in terms of forming attachments to a new child (either through repartnering with someone who is already a parent, or through giving birth to a sibling). For grieving parents the fact of having to be present for their other children, or form a relationship with a new child, can involve complex emotions. One mother stated **"I was petrified to have another child"**. The fact that



the new child was the same sex as her first child, was in some ways confronting for her. Would he wear the same clothes, look like his brother? Despite these challenges, though, the new relationship with the sibling brought life back to the parents: **"A light was switched on in our lives with him. We were in the dark for too long. We had to adapt as a couple again"**.

Another mother, who had been "desperate" to have another child of the same sex, agreed that having the new baby brought **"hope and light back into our lives"**. With each new child, this mother **"could not believe that they were staying"** until they were 40 days old.

Two parents talked about the importance of new partners' children



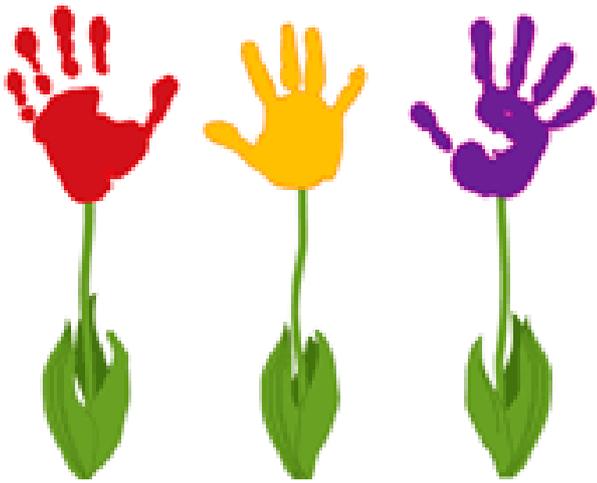


in their lives. **"The children gave me that feeling of being wanted and loved"** said one mother. An auntie who was attending the group confided that when her sister started a new relationship and there were two kids (of the new partner) involved, initially she could not imagine loving them, but that over time they **"taught us how to love again. You just don't know how to feel and then someone comes along and your heart starts beating again"**.

Group participants also spoke about the function of new friendships in their lives. Some parents expressed that in the acuteness of grief they felt awkward or painful going out, socialising or interacting with

friends. Yet sometimes there are particular friendships, whether old or new, which can be sustaining. One mother talked about how two friends who have known her for only twelve months, are helping her "declutter" her home. Particularly since losing her daughter she **"hangs on to everything"**, not being able to touch or dust anything in case her daughter's fingerprints might be on it. These friends have been helping her to do some of the "packing up" that felt so unbearable, and to build a memorial to her daughter in the backyard to preserve memories in a different way. **"I worked with these people and as the clutter is being cleared, I feel we have a lot to get through but it feels**





better". Her daughter's fingerprints are now framed and she feels she can now dust and generally function better. **"My friends helped me cope better"**. Her sister also expressed feeling relieved that her sister is getting looked after.

Another significant relationship which helped her allow the decluttering was that with her young adult daughter, who had stated around this issue that she was embarrassed to bring her friends home. **"My daughter has been my anchor. She started grieving when I started coping"**.

Other parents expressed that their partner relationships with

the other grieving parent felt "new" but not necessarily in a good way. One mother stated **"I hate the new us without our child. When our child came along, our life was beautiful and now there is something missing. I know how much we love each other. But I hate my new life and our life without [our child]"**. Another mother agreed, expressing that where they had been as a couple was at the point of growing and investing in their family, and that since their child died all this purpose and identity as a couple



has gone: **"We were married, we had a baby, we have a second chance, we are jealous of others with children. We don't let kids in our house. It is not the same... We don't eat at the table. It is raw. We hate the world and feel robbed of our 3 year old"**. In this way parents are forced to navigate changes in their longstanding relationship as if it were, in some ways, new.

What was striking listening to group participants' stories and thoughts on this evening, was that the topic of navigating new

relationships is much more complex than one might initially think. Grief brings with it a new relation to yourself as parent, your child, other children and family members and your partner and co-parent. These shifting relations are necessarily part of the landscape of any actual "new" relationships which might bring support, joy or sustenance to a grieving parent.

Once again, thank you to the group participants who attended, shared their presence, their ideas, experiences and wisdom.

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*If tears could build a stairway,  
And memories a lane,  
I'd walk right up to Heaven  
And bring you home again.*

 [loveliveson.com](http://loveliveson.com)

# *Straight from the Heart*



## **How Long Will It Take To Get Over It?**

TCF Fort Lauderdale, Fl.

*How long will it take me to get over the feeling of sorrow?  
A lifetime.*

*How long will I continue to feel guilty?  
As long as it takes you to realize you did nothing wrong.*

*How long will it take me to get over my anger?  
As long as it will take you to stop blaming yourself and others  
and realize it was the combination of unpredictable happenings  
that occur in one's lifetime.*

*Why do friends give such horrid advice?  
To cover up their own inability to handle the situation.*

*Will I ever be happy again and be able to laugh?  
An emphatic YES.*

*How long is long?  
As long as it takes for you to go through the process.  
Each individual has his or her own timetable,  
but it is up to you to make the decision when to start healing.*

Source: [http://bereavedparents.com/?page\\_id=65](http://bereavedparents.com/?page_id=65)

## *Our letter box is Waiting!*



Contributions such as responses and reflections on the groups' themes, poems, letters, songs, quotations from parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters and friends, feedback about this newsletter are most welcome. Share your thoughts, experiences, questions with others who are bereaved. Please forward them to:

Family Bereavement Support Programme  
Social Work Department  
Royal Children's Hospital  
50 Flemington Road  
PARKVILLE VIC 3052  
Phone: 03 9345 6111  
Or email:  
bereavement.services@rch.org.au

***\*If you would like to receive  
the newsletter by email  
please send us your email  
details to the provided  
address.\****

The next meeting of the  
Family Bereavement Support Evening Group will be held on:

**Thursday 21st September  
7:30 pm – 9:00 pm  
The RCH Foundation Board Room  
Level 2, 48 Flemington Road  
Parkville, VIC 3052**

Please join us to discuss the topic:

### ***“Sharing stories of your child”***

*This group will be an opportunity to share stories about your child with the group.*

*Please bring along photos or any items you may like to help with this story telling.*

Please join us in September

*The newsletter is always a team effort.*

*Thank you to Robyn Clark for facilitating, guiding the group discussion and writing the newsletter  
and to Raji Jacob for scribing parents' statements.*

*Also to Jenny Jelic for ensuring the newsletter is typed, formatted, collated and  
distributed to interested people and to the RCH Volunteers for mailing assistance.*

***Social Work Department, RCH***

