

FAMILY BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Social Work Department

NEWSLETTER MARCH 2020



To all those parents who have attended or were planning to attend the RCH Parent Bereavement Group, those who read our newsletters or who have been recently bereaved:

We're sorry that the group has had to be temporarily suspended at this time due to the pressing need for social distancing measures to slow the spread of COVID-19. We extend our thoughts and best wishes to you at this difficult time which for some of you may be exacerbating the grief you are already feeling. Our newsletter usually constitutes a summary of the discussion in the monthly group. However given the current circumstances, we are using this edition to make contact as well as provide some ideas about how you might care for yourselves and your loved ones in this more than usually uncertain and highly stressful environment.



For bereaved parents, self-care at times when grief is at its most raw, can be very difficult to put one's mind to or prioritise. Navigating broader problems of family, friends or work can be a daunting challenge when you are grieving. Anniversaries and collective celebration times such as Christmas, New Year and Easter can be particularly hard, dealing with triggers of your own grief as well as the expectations of others in your world: parents have often spoke about these dilemmas in the group. Your usual avenues, resources and support people for coping with times of intensified grieving may not be available at present due to restricted movement, activities and service provision as well

as the requirement for social distancing. The COVID-19 crisis will be likely adding a layer of significant stress for you as you navigate the familial, social, societal and logistical aspects of this pandemic. At this time more than ever it is important for you to allow yourself the time and space to look after yourself, recharge and where needed, find alternative means of connection and support.

Increasingly online avenues will be an important way of keeping connected as well as finding resources to assist you in your ongoing grieving. Many find that using social media or teleconferencing platforms can be a way of staying connected with your significant others,

extended family or close friends – hence the burgeoning use of apps such as Zoom, Facetime, Skype, What’s App, etc! The challenge is utilising these means of connection, staying both informed and supported but managing to avoid the constant updates of information and debate about the pandemic which one gets exposed to online, which can be hard to resist but can feed in to one’s distress. Many are finding it helpful to put a limit on how many times they check for updates (eg only twice a day), and are instead using online platforms to have regular catch up times or virtual dinner with friends or family members. If you have been accessing the support of a mental health professional, your sessions should be able to continue as most are offering telehealth – ask your therapist about this if you’re not sure.



Professional online information and support for those who are dealing with grief **and** the pandemic, can be helpful at these times when you might not be able to access usual supports. The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement offers an app called “My Grief” which provides information and tools to support those who have been bereaved. Click on this link if you would like to have a look at this resource:

https://www.grief.org.au/ACGB/Bereavement_Support/MyGrief/ACGB/Bereavement_Support/MyGrief.aspx?hkey=aa58a004-82f0-408e-8ce5-7f0d0624df87

Those of you who have regular rituals and activities to help you stay connected in your relation to, and memories of your child who has died, may find that at this time you are unable to attend to those usual activities. It may be important to create some other ways within your immediate environment, eg utilising a memorial area in your garden, using writing or blogging to honour your child, setting aside a time and space for quiet reflection each day or sharing a phone-call with another bereaved parent or support person once a week.



Often parents in the group have spoken about their distress when people “say the wrong thing”, don’t understand what you need as a bereaved parent, forget about significant dates or expect you to be “over” your grief. Parents state that they have often found sensitivity and support in places they didn’t expect, and have learnt to choose to be around the friends or family members who really “get it”. In the current situation of heightened anxiety and hardship across society, people may be more than usually preoccupied with their own worries and



some may be less attune to your ongoing sense of grief and loss. Make sure you keep contact with the people who do “get it” and keep communicating with them about what helps you.

Mindfulness is a form of attention to self and to “being present” which many find helpful in times of intensified grief or stress. For free access to some mindfulness exercises which you or your family members might find helpful, click on the following link:

<https://mindfulnessexercises.com/free-mindfulness-worksheets/>

Parents attending the bereavement group have often talked about the challenge they have as bereaved parents thinking about the needs of their living children, keeping their much loved departed child an integral part of the family but also focusing on what is right for siblings at each stage of their development and each life challenge. The current health crisis is one that can be anxiety provoking for children and adolescents (as well as their parents). Some children may become more clingy or withdrawn. They may get cranky more easily, be anxious or unsettled. Many will have lots of questions which they will direct to you. Thinking about how to best support and respond to them (whilst you are still dealing with your other grief-related emotions), may be

challenging, and there are some resources which may assist with this.

The RCH internet page now includes a video from Dr. Margie Danchin to assist parents with supporting children through COVID-19, and can be accessed via this link:

[https://www.rch.org.au/rch/Coronavirus_\(COVID-19\)/](https://www.rch.org.au/rch/Coronavirus_(COVID-19)/)

The Kids Health Info factsheet also includes some very helpful information:

https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Supporting_children_and_young_people_to_cope_with_the_coronavirus_COVID-19_pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR1Cotwc9upm_HAE-gXFpDz0O1lm1ZJSMVYrNMCsIW0tBbp5yTfiKqvX5Q

If you have teenage children in your household, their anxiety will be likely to present very differently to younger children's. The following link to the Unicef website is one which your teenager can have a look at to get some strategies for looking after their mental health at this stressful time when they are missing out on a lot of their usual routines, social outlets and school events, and may feel isolated, anxious or disappointed.



<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-teenagers-can-protect-their-mental-health-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

Take care of yourself and your loved ones at this time. Try to pace yourself as this process of slowing the spread of COVID-19 and keeping as many people as well as possible for as long as possible, is likely to be a long haul. If you're working, make sure you have the best possible and safest working arrangements for yourself and your colleagues, and that you get proper breaks and respite when you need it. Get some exercise on your own or with your family, eat well and stay connected with those close to you. Remember the ways you managed to get through enormously difficult times in the past and try to draw on those strategies that you feel will work best for you in the current environment.

We will endeavour to stay in touch via newsletters over the next couple of months. If you have ideas, pieces of writing, suggestions for books or other resources that you would like to share with other readers of the Bereavement newsletter, please email them to us care of

Marina Puljic at:

Bereavement.Services@rch.org.au



Our letter box is Waiting!



Contributions such as responses and reflections on the groups' themes, poems, letters, songs, reviews of books that you may have found helpful, 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:

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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
email address.****

The next meeting of the
Family Bereavement Support Evening Group
Will be advised by email



*The newsletter is always a team effort.
Thank you to Robyn Clark for writing the newsletter.
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formatted, collated and distributed to interested people.*

Social Work Department, RCH

