Autumn is a perfect time for healing events

The old adage says, “Time flies when you’re having fun.” Often it seems vacation is just getting started when it’s time to head home, or we are just beginning to reconnect with our grandchildren only to see their tail lights exiting the driveway.

However, when we are grieving, time seems to drag on. Recently, a grieving woman shared, “One day seems to last an eternity.” Hours feel like days, and days feel like weeks. The truth is the grief process is difficult and takes longer than we expect.

Coastal Hospice strives to provide meaningful activities that will gradually move you toward healing. Here are upcoming healing events to consider:

Hope & Healing with Horses
Saturday, September 29, 9:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Check in: 9:15 - 9:30 a.m.
Kindred Spirit Farm, 31191 Johnson Rd., Salisbury

This annual event is for children ages 6-14 who have experienced the death of a family member or closely connected loved one. The event is free, but space is limited. Advance registration is required. Children must be accompanied by a responsible adult. This event is open to hospice and non-hospice families. Lunch is provided. The rain date is October 6. Riding is involved so children must wear closed-toed shoes. No horse experience is necessary.

For information and to register, call Melissa at 443-944-5846.

Not long ago, a psychology professor was teaching stress management principles to her students at a local university. As she raised a glass of water, everyone expected they’d be asked the typical “glass half empty or glass half full” question. Instead, the professor asked, “How heavy is this glass of water I’m holding?”

Students shouted out answers ranging from eight ounces to a couple pounds.

The professor replied, “From my perspective, the absolute weight of this glass doesn’t matter. It all depends on how long I hold it. If I hold it for a minute or two, it’s fairly light. If I hold it for an hour straight, its weight might make my arm ache a little. If I hold it for a day, my arm will likely cramp and feel completely numb and paralyzed, forcing me to drop the glass to the floor. In each case, the weight of the glass doesn’t change, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it feels to me.”

As the class shook their heads in agreement, she continued, “Your stresses and worries in life are very much like this glass of water. Think about them for a while, and nothing happens. Think about them a bit longer, and you begin to ache a little. Think about them all day long, and you will feel completely numb and paralyzed — incapable of doing anything else until you drop them.”

On this journey through grief, many days may be filled with sorrow, stresses, and worries that seem insurmountable. It is important to remember that, at the point when you feel you just can't go on, let it go. No matter what happens during the day, as early in the evening as possible, put all your burdens down. Don't carry them through the night and into the next day.

If today you are still feeling the weight of yesterday’s stress, it’s a strong sign that it’s time to put the glass down.
When we lose a loved one, the emotional effects can be devastating as we work through the process of grief. This is an individual experience; each of us is different in how we grieve as well as how long it will take us to heal.

Many who are bereaved will find comfort in attending support groups or spending time with close friends and family. As part of that process, we will often find ourselves sharing memories of our loved one — the good as well as the bad and even the sad. Sharing our loss and remembering the loved one is an important step in the process to healing.

Journaling or writing down our memories, thoughts and emotions over the loss can also be a source of healing. In a study conducted by Southern Methodist University, Ohio State University, North Dakota State University and University of Texas at Austin, researchers found that the therapeutic benefits of writing can lead to an increased sense of well-being and health benefits that include a lessening of physical pain, a resistance to colds and flu, and even improved blood pressure and heart rates.

### Using words to let go of emotions

When it comes to journaling, there are really no hard and fast rules, but there are some guidelines that might help make the process more productive. The most important element in journaling is to be open and easy with yourself. In order to ensure that you get the most out of your grief journal, you may want to decide that you won't share it — at least for the time being. By making a pledge to yourself that your journal remains private, you give yourself the freedom to write exactly what you're feeling at the moment — without judgment or criticism.

If you're feeling angry, sad, lonely, helpless, hopeless or even relieved, let your words express the pain you're feeling. The very act of writing your emotions, especially when you write in detail from the heart, will create a sense of freedom. When those emotions are on paper, you no longer need to own them. When you reread them, you can do so as an observer, from a position of objectivity.

### Getting started

Though you may find classes available that can offer structure and guidance, you can begin the journaling process with little more than a spiral-bound notebook or your laptop computer and a quiet space and place. It’s okay if your journal isn’t in chronological order, and it’s perfectly fine if you have misspellings and poor punctuation. Journaling is the best kind of writing, because you have complete freedom in the process.

### What to write about

There is no right way or wrong way to journal. What has been shown to provide emotional and health benefits is writing about what happened to you and putting down how you felt about it. Your entries need not be long and involved. During the early phase of grief, you may not have the energy to put down more than a word or two each day to track your feelings or what you did. That’s fine. Every little bit helps. (Some journal therapists call these brief notes telegraph entries.) As time passes, writing about the person you lost and the loss itself will become easier. Experiment to find out what works best for you.

### RECOMMENDED READING

“A Time to Grieve: Meditations on Healing After the Death of a Loved One”  
By Carol Staudacher

A collection of truly comforting, down-to-earth thoughts and meditations, including the authentic voices of survivors, for anyone grieving the loss of a loved one. We highly recommend her book to you as a further means of connection on your grief and recovery journey.
Upcoming healing events
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In addition to the Hope and Healing with Horses event, we have several memorial services scheduled. Our memorial services are special times for hospice families and friends to gather together to remember and honor their loved ones. Joining with others to honor those we’ve lost is an important part of the healing process.

The services are free, and we welcome anyone who would like to attend. For more information, please call Melissa Dasher at 410-742-8732.

Coastal Hospice bereavement care in the community

By Nicole Long, Bereavement Counselor

Benefits of bereavement support groups for grieving persons can include a variety of advantages: a greater sense of connection, understanding of the grief journey as it relates to mind, body and soul, friendship, increased ability to embrace one’s life without the loved one, laughter, exploration and letting go of regret, guilt and anger, and more openness to continue to grow as a person.

Last fall, the Coastal Hospice bereavement care department was contacted by Susan Atwood, founder and administrator of Bay Shore, Inc., to request assistance.

The mission of Bay Shore, Inc. is to enhance the lives of people with disabilities and children with economic disadvantages in terms of self-esteem, personal fulfillment, living conditions, community integration, and learning potential. Atwood points out a sobering insight: that most of us are only temporarily “able.”

The work she pursues is about valuing and tending what ability there is, and reaching one’s full potential. Howard Travers, manager of bereavement care at Coastal Hospice, and I met with Atwood and agreed to start a group to assist in achieving her mission and the mission of Coastal Hospice - to promote dignity and quality of life. Atwood identified a list of individuals who had experienced deaths and who were having challenges coping and, since fall of 2017, I’ve been facilitating a small group at Bay Shore.

Participants share a bond and demonstrate compassion for each other. Having a safe, open space in which to share, and to be well-supported once the feelings are shared, has allowed these individuals an opportunity to heal some of the anger, isolation, and profound sorrow they had to cope with day-to-day.

Periodically, members are asked to evaluate their own progress. According to both their assessments of themselves, and reports from staff, healing is happening. For example, one of the group members participates in more social outings and now volunteers in the community three days a week. Another individual reports not being angry anymore - though he misses his loved one deeply. Releasing this anger decreases his stress and improves his quality of life.

In August, I facilitated a small, closed, personal memorial service (with their input on planning it) to allow participants to honor their loved ones together. The group shared a meal together afterwards as a symbolic gesture of the community we have generated over the past year.

The transformations that happen in bereavement support groups are personal, hidden and humble. However, cumulatively, the people who allow themselves to take the grief journey heal themselves and heal our community. That’s what Coastal Hospice bereavement care strives for and the evidence in the lives of Bay Shore residents speaks for itself.

Hope and Healing with Horses
Saturday, September 29, 9:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Check in: 9:15 - 9:30 a.m.
Kindred Spirit Farm, 31191 Johnson Rd., Salisbury

Worcester County Memorial Service
Tuesday, October 9, 3 p.m.
OC Fishing Pier
Off the Inlet Parking Lot, Ocean City

Wicomico County Memorial Service
Friday, October 19, 2 p.m.
Dove Pointe, 1225 Mt. Herman Rd., Salisbury

Somerset County Memorial Service
Friday, October 26, 2 p.m.
J. Millard Tawes Museum, 3 9th St., Crisfield
TO OPT OUT: You are likely receiving this publication following the death of a family member, friend or loved one who received care from Coastal Hospice. Grief support is a vital part of the hospice philosophy of care. This publication serves to share information you can use during this time and highlight upcoming events. If you do not wish to continue receiving this publication or have a change of address, please contact Melissa Dasher at 410-742-8732, ext. 621 or mdasher@coastalhospice.org.

UPCOMING GRIEF SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

**Dorchester County**
**Support Group** – Mondays at 3 p.m.
Dorchester Co. Library, Cambridge
Sept. 10 & 24, Oct. 15 & 29
**Information** ~ Marceline Brooks-Williams 443-859-1312

**Somerset County**
**Support Group** – Every 1st and 3rd Tuesday at 11 a.m.
Somerset Co. Library, Crisfield
**Information** ~ Nicole Long 443-614-6142

**Memorial Service** - Oct. 26 at 2 p.m.
J. Millard Tawes Museum, Crisfield
**RSVP** ~ Melissa Dasher 443-944-5846

**Wicomico County**
**Lunch Social Group** – all at 1 p.m.
Sept. 12 - Ruby Tuesday, 413 N. Fruitland Blvd., Salisbury
Sept. 26 - Bob Evans, 2601 N. Salisbury Blvd., Salisbury
Oct. 10 - Olive Garden, Centre at Salisbury, Salisbury
Oct. 24 - Denny's, 100 East Cedar Lane, Fruitland
**RSVP** ~ Lynette Chase 410-901-2292

**Support Group** – Fridays at 1 p.m.
MAC Center, 909 Progress Circle, Salisbury
**Information** ~ Nicole Long 443-614-6142

**Seashell Memorial Gathering** - Oct. 9 at 3 p.m.
OC Fishing Pier, off of inlet parking lot, Ocean City
**Information** ~ Melissa Dasher 443-944-5846

**NOTE:** All lunch socials are “Dutch treat.”