

# “What About Me?”

Managing your own grief  
while caring for your child can be overwhelming.  
Discover ways to support yourself while supporting your child.

1. Introduce the topic and review learning objectives
  - a. Learning Objectives
    - i. You will learn about the importance of self-care in relation to your grief and your children.
    - ii. You will be able to identify signs and symptoms of your own grief.
    - iii. You will also come away with some information that is helpful for you to understand and manage your own grief and stress levels.
  - b. The Caring Place is giving you **PERMISSION** to grieve.
    - i. Alan Wolfelt’s Grief Myth (pg. 145) – “Parents don’t have to mourn for their children to mourn.”
    - ii. Wolfelt also talks about caregivers as “**Grief Gardeners** - people who provide a nurturing environment in which bereaved children can not only heal, but grow.”
      1. Parents are the most important grief gardeners for their children.
  - c. **The Caregiver’s conundrum:** How does a caregiver care well for their children while at the same time taking good care of herself/himself?
    1. **Importance of Self Care** – poor self-care results in distraction from your children. Children are intuitive and know when we are not physically, emotionally and spiritually available to them. (i.e. Air Mask)
      - a. Three reasons
        - i. We owe it to our families.
        - ii. Helping your children is exhausting work, physically, emotionally and spiritually.
        - iii. We owe it to our children.
2. Define Self Awareness and do a Self Awareness activity
  - a. **Self-Awareness** – is the ability to identify your own attitudes and values, and how they influence your behavior.
    - i. It involves dealing with our unresolved conflicts from the past.
    - ii. It can help you reduce stress. We are often the biggest cause of stress. Allow your self to be less than perfect.
    - iii. It can help reduce power struggles with your children.
  - b. **Stress/Self Awareness Activity**
    - i. Think back to your own family and how grief was handled.

- ii. Brainstorm all the ways by which you can tell you are under stress - (physical and emotional signs)
- iii. Think of all the sources of stress in your life
- iv. Make a note of which of these sources are within your control to change and which are outside of your control.

c. **Thomas C. Hart** – “Oh, God, Give me the courage to change the things I can change, the serenity to accept that which I cannot change, and the wisdom to distinguish between the two.” (page 52, Living when a loved one has died”

d. How are these stressors affected by your own grief?

### 3. Grief Education

a. **Grief** – The thoughts and feelings that are experienced within us when someone we love dies. The internal meaning given to the experience of bereavement.

#### i. Secondary Losses

##### 1. Loss of Self

- a. self
- b. identity
- c. self-confidence
- d. health
- e. personality

##### 2. Loss of Security

- a. emotional security
- b. physical security
- c. fiscal security
- d. lifestyle

##### 3. Loss of Meaning

- a. goals and dreams
- b. faith
- c. will/desire to live
- d. joy

ii. Know that your grief is unique. Your grief is different from others' grief because of the situation surrounding your loss, the supports system you are currently involved with and the wide range of emotions you may be feeling. Your past experiences with death may also be affecting your current grief process.

1. (Activity for you in your packet)

2. Beware of the Cliché's.

- a. Dr. Earl Grollman – pg.10-11, Unsolicited Advice

- b. **Mourning** – The external expression of grief. Sharing one’s grief with others.
  - i. How do you mourn?
    - 1. “You are not only mentally upset; you are physically distressed, and may experience strange bodily symptoms: Nausea, Dizziness, Palpitations, Tightness in your throat, Dry mouth, Sickening sensations in the pit of your stomach, Rashes, Tension headaches, Back pain, Loss of appetite, Considerable weight loss or even weight gain, Insomnia, Sighing, Fatigue, ‘Certain knowledge’ that you now have the same fatal illness that killed your beloved. Or that you will have the same mishap. Depressing emotions bring physical pain. (Dr. Earl Grollman, “Living When a Loved One has Died”, pg. 37-38)
- c. Handouts/Pamphlets
  - i. Helping yourself heal when someone dies.
  - ii. Helping yourself heal when a spouse dies.
  - iii. Helping yourself heal when a child dies.
  - iv. Helping yourself heal when a baby dies.

4. **Complicated Mourning** – this is a list intended to help people recognize complicated grief in their children and in themselves. Pay careful attention to the qualifiers, total, persistent, prolonged, chronic, consistent and dramatic. Otherwise we may mistake normal grief for complicated grief.

a. **Signs and Symptoms of Complicated Grief**

- i. Total denial of the reality of the death
- ii. Persistent panic, fear
- iii. Prolonged physical complaints without organic findings
- iv. Prolonged feelings of guilt or responsibility for the death
- v. *Chronic* patterns of apathy and/or depression
- vi. *Chronic* hostility, acting-out toward others or self
- vii. Prolonged change in typical behavior patterns or personality
- viii. Consistent withdrawal from friends and family members
- ix. Dramatic, ongoing changes in sleeping and eating patterns
- x. Drug or alcohol abuse
- xi. Suicidal thoughts or actions

b. Referrals

- i. Any of The Caring Place staff would be willing to provide you with a referral for counseling if you think you or your children might be having difficulty with any of the above issues.

## 5. Support Systems

- a. What supports do you currently utilize?
- b. List several activities that might help you take care of your needs.
  - i. Dr. Earl Grollman – “Getting out of Yourself”, pg. 89-91
- c. Self Care Guidelines
  - i. Create periods of rest and renewal
  - ii. Be compassionate with yourself about not being perfect!
  - iii. Practice setting limits and alleviating stresses you can do something about.
  - iv. Learn effective time-management skills.
  - v. Work to cultivate a personal support system.
  - vi. Develop healthy eating, sleeping and exercise patterns.
  - vii. Strive to identify the unique ways in which your body signals you are stressed.