

Haven Herald



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I have very mixed emotions as I leave my position as Executive Director of Haven after four years. While I look forward to a new home and community, I will miss all of the wonderful, caring volunteers that make Haven so special.

When I began volunteering at Haven 13 years ago, I just wanted to take one-on-one clients and help them work their way through their grief. I had no interest in being on the staff. However, about four months after I began telephone duty, I was asked to become Associate Director of Public Relations. I agreed to help through the summer until they could find someone else. No one told me it was an elective position, for a year no less! Not only did I stay, but I have been on the staff every year since then, and I would not trade the experience for anything.

I have had many wonderful clients who have proved how resilient people are. It is one of the most incredible experiences to watch people rebuild their lives after the loss of a loved one. Because I most often work with widowed persons, the rebuilding usually involves developing a new identity. That new identity may be good, but it will also be very different.

I have a real appreciation for young widows with children. While they are grieving the loss of their spouse, their children are also grieving the loss of a parent. Often a widowed client will say, "It feels good to just sit quietly for a few minutes." I truly admire my clients who are raising children and grieving at the same time. We sometimes have calls from women who say "my last child is going to college, and now I want a one-on-one because I need to grieve for my husband."

I have learned how helpful support groups can be to people who are grieving. A person new to grief looks at people who have been grieving for a year and thinks, if they made it, I guess I can make it too, and the people who have grieved for about a year realize that they have made progress; though they still hurt, their grief is not that raw.

One of my most rewarding experiences at Haven has been watching my clients work their way through their grief and develop a "new normal." I often know they are ready to spread their wings and fly before they do. I would not trade my years at Haven with my wonderful clients and all of the kind, caring volunteers for anything. It has been a pleasure to be involved with the greatest of **all** volunteer organizations anywhere. I truly believe that Haven will be here for another thirty-five years if we continue to change to meet the needs of the community and continue to attract wonderful, dedicated volunteers. As Peggy Cauley, a former Haven Executive Director, has always told me, "Haven will be here as long as it is meant to be here," and I am very thankful for the opportunity to have been a part of Haven for the last thirteen years.

--Frankie Smith

What Worked for Me By Joyce Kirk

“You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.”

That was one of my father’s many bits of “barnyard philosophy.” It wasn’t until I was widowed and left with two teenagers that I truly began to understand the meaning of the statement. When my husband received a terminal diagnosis, he and I agreed that we would share the diagnosis and prognosis not only with our son and daughter but also with friends at work and at church. We received support from both.

After my husband died, I was offered and accepted continued support in groups for widows. The children were also offered the support of a teen group and one-on-one counseling but refused such help; they didn’t want to appear different to their friends. My son wanted me to stop talking about it, to forget it. But I couldn’t forget a love of 25 years, and I needed help to get through my pain. A therapist said that the best way to help my children was to work on my own grief. So I sought help and later volunteered to help others who had experienced a death in the family.

Two weeks after my husband’s death, I returned to work and my children returned to school. In retrospect, that amazes me, but I wanted to set an example for my children, and we had to go on living for Dad. When my children began college, they learned from new friends that they weren’t the only ones who had a death in the family. They discovered that sharing their experience and feelings was the basis for meaningful friendships. It was also a way to release the emotions that they had locked in their hearts.

My daughter became a social studies teacher in junior and senior high schools, but more than that, she helped students and teachers who had faced a death in the family. Because of her experience, she could empathize with and provide support to her students and her adult friends. My son volunteered as a bereavement camp counselor, which allowed him not only to make a difference in children’s lives but also to deal with emotions that he had suppressed. He describes his experience as one of the most meaningful in his life.

As parents, we teach by example. “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.” You can provide the pool of water, and your children can drink when they are ready to quench their thirst. As parents, we can show them how to do that.

Summer Grief Camps

When children or teens experience the death of a significant person in their life, they need help to deal with the strong emotions of grief. Grief camps can provide children and teens the opportunity to learn ways of dealing with grief and to meet other children who have experienced similar losses.

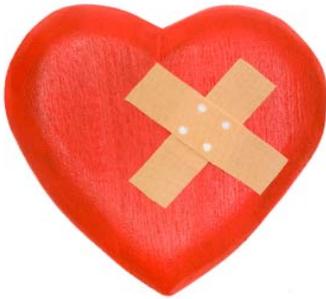
Three grief camps for children and/or teens in the Washington, D.C. area: Wendt Center for Loss and Healing’s *Camp Forget-Me-Not*; Capital Hospice’s *Point of Hope Camp*; and *Comfort Zone Camp*. Check their individual Web sites for more information.



Children and Grief

By Charlie Brown

Adapted from a presentation given by Charlie Brown, Haven Volunteer, to Fairfax County Public School Administrators, Counselors, Social Workers and Psychologists. This was part of a two-hour workshop, "Understanding Grief within the Cultural Context," sponsored by FCPS Human Resources Division as part of a program to increase awareness and sensitivity when dealing with grieving students.



People sometimes have misconceptions about how children grieve. Grief is internal (personal thoughts and feelings), while mourning is grief made public or external. A child may grieve a loss without appearing to be mourning. Children should be encouraged to share their feelings in any way that they can; creative arts and/or play can be especially helpful.

Some believe that children grieve for only a short time. Children's ability to remain in a state of grief depends on their age and attention span. The younger a child, the shorter the time period tends to be, but the child may return to that state more often. Young children are especially likely to ask questions or make comments about the lost loved one and then move on to other unrelated topics. Some may raise questions multiple times as they seek to understand the loss at whatever level they can.

Some people believe that caregivers do not have to mourn in order for their children to mourn. Children tend to take their cues from the adults around them, and if they deny their grief, children see that and feel it is wrong or inappropriate to burden them with their grief. It is the adults' job to demonstrate how to voice and cope with grief.

The idea that bereaved children grow up to be maladjusted adults is not true. On the contrary, children who are respected and supported in their grief tend to become caring, compassionate adults who can help and support others in need. Many of these children are especially sensitive to the pain of others.

Many think it best that children do not attend funerals. This misconception can be hurtful to many children who need an opportunity to say goodbye with the support of family and friends. It is rare that a child is better off not attending a funeral. Discussing acceptable behavior before a funeral will help a child. "Play acting" or "scripting" may help to ensure that a child can handle the funeral.

Some believe that children who cry too much are being weak and harming themselves. Children who cry are making their feelings known and should be allowed this release without being made to feel guilty about it. This is especially true for boys, who should never be told that tears are for girls and that boys don't cry.

The misconception that the death of a loved one should not be discussed with children because they are too young to understand can leave children frightened and bewildered at what is transpiring around them. While children are limited by their experiences and ability to understand, even very young children recognize sadness in the adults around them. The failure to explain a death in a simple way may cause children to become anxious and upset. They may incorrectly believe that the loved one has gone away because of something they did and that other adults will similarly abandon them. Children often mourn a loss more than once as they grow older and understand the significance of the loss.

Finally, each child processes grief in his or her own way and time and should be respected as an individual. Just as adults don't get over grief but learn to live with a loss, so too do children if properly supported and encouraged.



HOW HAVEN IS FUNDED

Haven is classified by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. It is funded mainly by donations from individuals in the community who wish to support our work and by those who donate in memory of a loved one. Donations are tax deductible. If you are interested in making a donation, please contact Haven at (703) 941-7000 or at havenofnova@verizon.net

Summer Schedule

Summer Workshops

“Journey through Grief”
Saturday, June 25, 2011 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.
Call for reservations for the workshop

“Journey through Grief”
August 2011
Date and time to be announced
Call for more information and reservations

Haven also offers individual support by phone and in person; please call to schedule an appointment. For immediate support without an appointment, a volunteer is available on a walk-in basis Monday through Friday between 10:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.

Contact Information

Haven of Northern Virginia
4606 Ravensworth Road
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Hours of Operation

Monday through Friday
9:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
www.havenofnova.org

Messages may be left on our
voicemail after hours

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