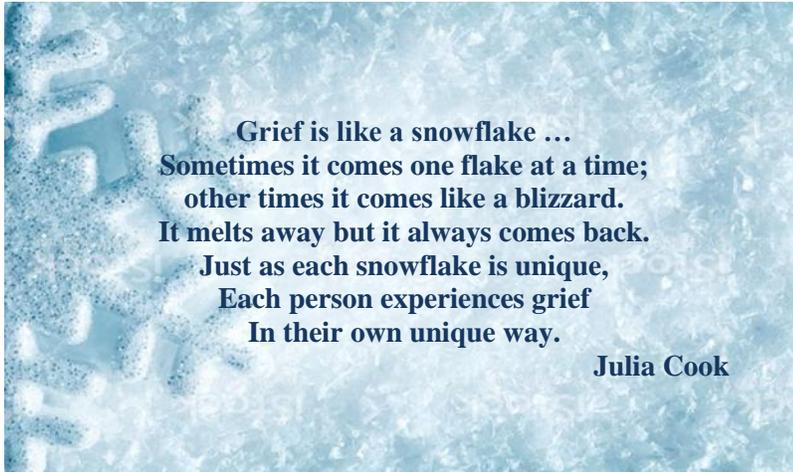


Haven Herald



Grief is like a snowflake ...
 Sometimes it comes one flake at a time;
 other times it comes like a blizzard.
 It melts away but it always comes back.
 Just as each snowflake is unique,
 Each person experiences grief
 In their own unique way.

Julia Cook

I Just Need to Talk...

by Kathleen Sebek

At Haven, our clients have taught us the importance of having a safe place to talk about their grief. They may need to express sadness, guilt, anger or any and all emotional reactions to the death of their loved one. There may be traumatic layers to their particular loss as well, especially for those who have experienced a loss due to suicide. There may be very real concrete implications to the loss, i.e., financial, housing or social losses.

Those who are grieving often feel a reluctance to share their true feelings with others. Grieving people recognize when their family, friends, and co-workers avoid them. They feel that there is a gap between them and the rest of the world. Most acknowledge that people just do not know what to say. There is an understanding that the intention may not be to avoid, but the isolation is there just the same.

Haven offers grief support groups. Our participants tell us that the group process helps them to understand that they are not alone, they are not crazy, and other group members speak their "language." They also learn about their own grief and progress from the group experience.

Continued on page 2

Letter from the Executive Director

Winter is the season that metaphorically relates to death with its dark, cold and sometimes bleak days. But there is also warmth and light in winter that comforts and protects. Haven adapts to this time of year and we do our best to continue to offer caring support in spite of weather challenges and closings.

This edition of Haven's newsletter addresses the importance of support when we are in grief. We often find support through the process of elimination as we come to realize there are very few truly safe places to talk about our loss. We want to tell our story and we need to be with someone who is willing to show us compassion and to really listen. Peer support can be effective and therapeutic. Studies have shown that a degree in psychology is not necessary to help someone who just needs an empathetic and kind person to listen and be a witness to their grief.

Haven's trained volunteers cannot fix your grief but they can walk with you and validate, with care and trust, that something life changing and sad has happened to you. You don't have to go through this time alone.

Jill Bellacicco

Seasons Greetings!

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Please note that this does not mean that a group is appropriate for all of us. Many of us are more comfortable speaking individually about our loss, and talking it out doesn't work for everyone. We should never feel "pushed" into telling our stories if it increases our discomfort. The important piece is that we are able to express our grief in a way that benefits us individually. Loss can never be fixed, however it must be acknowledged and felt if we are to move forward. Otherwise it just waits for us.

So what helps? Express your feelings through talking, sharing or other ways, and accept that all feelings are okay and are both normal and necessary for healing. Identify and name your feelings, ask for what you need, knowing that not everyone is prepared to hear your story or can be present to your pain. Find someone who is comfortable listening to you.

Here are a few tips for the listener. Accept that you might say the wrong thing, but please avoid platitudes. Be sincere, keep it simple, be honest, be present and know you can't fix it. Realize that there is no timeline to grief. Grieving people just want to talk and often feel better when they can express their feelings, knowing they have been heard.

What Worked for Me

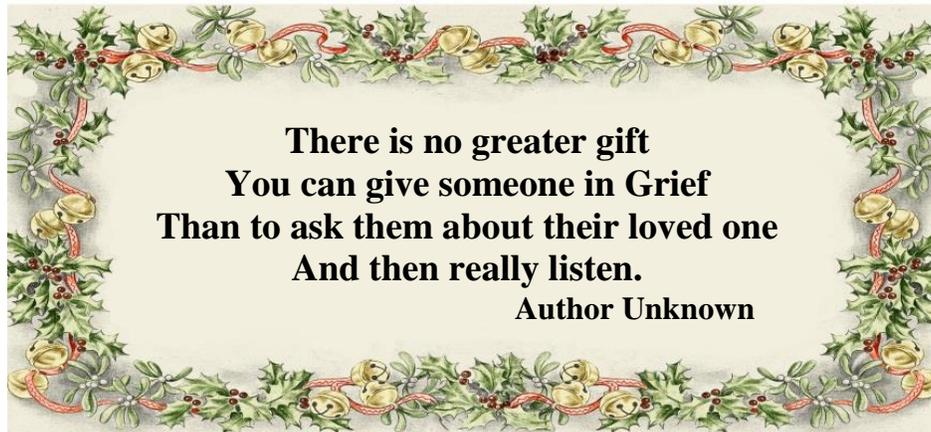
by Ann Lyons

My adult son collapsed while playing in a charity basketball game. Ten days later he died without regaining consciousness. When he died, I felt devastated, isolated and diminished. Approximately a month later, I found information about Haven of Northern Virginia, and mustered the courage to call. When I called, the person on the phone I talked to was compassionate and engaged me in conversation while explaining the bereavement support services provided by Haven volunteers. During the conversation, I asked for individual support. The phone volunteer requested some information, and told me a trained volunteer would contact me to arrange for me to meet with them at Haven.

During my first visit to Haven, the welcoming volunteer and peaceful atmosphere helped me feel at ease talking about my grief. As I told the story of losing my son, I felt the stress I was experiencing lessen. In the beginning we met weekly. Over the next several months we met less frequently. While I was deeply sad, I also struggled with a number of other emotions including anger. Mostly the anger was generalized, but sometimes I directed my anger at people for no reason at all. I gained more insight into my feelings of anger by talking candidly with a non-judgmental listener – my trained Haven volunteer. By having a safe space to talk and not being judged for what I was thinking or feeling or sharing, I started finding more appropriate outlets for my anger and the ways I expressed that anger. Additionally, I felt safe to talk about other concerns and found myself working through my grief and making progress. Later on, my volunteer encouraged me to participate in Haven's six-week general bereavement program. I found in the support group that the back-and-forth talking and listening, with mutual respect and support for each other, provided another step forward for me in my grief journey. I didn't feel isolated in my sadness.

Finding a safe place, and being able to talk in a supportive listening environment was a therapeutic gift to me, and one for which I am profoundly appreciative.





FIVE REASONS WHY IT'S SO IMPORTANT TO DISCUSS GRIEF

by David James Lees

1. **The situation and the painful emotion of grief will not improve by avoidance**

The sheer magnitude of grief can seem overwhelming. Often a first instinctive reaction may be to completely avoid facing up to this powerful emotion. Many people hide behind an impenetrable emotional wall for protection and safety.

2. **Talking about grief stops other negative and destructive emotions from building up**

It is important to understand that grieving is a natural process and it should be encouraged and supported. If you are grieving, talking can prevent a toxic tsunami of emotions from building up that would otherwise drag you deeper into a malaise of mental and emotional confusion.

3. **Facing up to your grief can help reaffirm or update your beliefs about life and death**

The loss of a loved one can suddenly challenge and sometimes destabilize your deepest core beliefs about yourself, your purpose, and the universe you live in. This applies regardless of whether you're a religious person, a follower of a spiritual path or a non-believer.

4. **Discussing your grief can prevent you from seeking solace in harmful lifestyle habits**

Being able to express and discuss your grief and sadness is much healthier than embarking on these harmful strategies. No matter how difficult, uncomfortable or downright painful your current situation is, talking can help you. It will enable you to authentically confront the reality of the situation and your loss, which will not only benefit you but also your family and loved ones.

5. **The grieving process will allow you to honor the memory of the person you've lost**

One of the issues we encourage grieving clients to address, at a time that is appropriate to them, is how to best respect the memory of the loved one they have lost. This is not only about remembering past joyful times, but also acknowledging their loved one's promises, hopes and dreams.

This article is excerpted from an interview that was published in The Evening Standard, April 2017. To read the full article, please visit <https://www.wuweiwisdom.com/5-important-reasons-to-discuss-grief/>



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



Haven of Northern Virginia, Inc.

4606 Ravensworth Road

Annandale, Virginia 22003

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Winter Schedule

Community Workshop

“Your Journey through Grief”
Saturday, January 26, 2019
2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Snow day: Saturday, February 9, 2019

Call to register

Drop-in Suicide Loss Support Group
1st and 3rd Saturdays of each month
11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Haven also offers individual support. 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
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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