

# HOW ARE YOU?

How are you? How very often, newly bereaved are asked this question. Suddenly those three simple words are no longer a standard greeting, but an honest expression of concern and inquiry as to our emotional and/or our physical health.

“How are you?” also becomes a polite way of asking if we are making progress in recovering from our loss and grief. Some even ask this question because they need reassurance that we will soon be “back to normal.” Our grief often makes those around us uncomfortable. Because of their need to comfort or to pity us, others may want to hear us answer that we feel awful.

In the early weeks following the accidental death of my ten-year old son, I keenly felt the entire neighborhood’s curiosity about how I was doing. Every time I left my house, I seemed to meet at least a dozen people who would ask, “How are you?”. I soon discovered that a quick pat answer satisfied most folks I encountered and was far easier than searching for an honest response. I began with, “Not too bad,” and after a few weeks progressed to “Pretty good.” Finally, I switched to “Fine, thank you. How about you?” Though these responses satisfied my friends and neighbors, inside the nagging questions of “How am I, really?” became increasingly difficult to answer.

There was no thermometer, no measuring stick, and no gauge with this to measure my recovery from the pain of my child’s death. Some days I didn’t feel too bad. Other days, I felt as though I had been assaulted and ripped apart by life itself. Was this roller coaster of emotion normal, I wondered? Did this wildly fluctuating state of mind mean I was recovering or not recovering, or even still sane? I had no sure way of knowing.

Eagerly searching for some way to measure and assure myself that I was on the way to recovery, I began reading books written by other bereaved parents. I listened to others share their stories of loss, and felt much less alone. I made a list of all the people I knew that had lost children, including some for whom it may have been years. It helped to know other people who had survived and made me feel less like an oddball or a curiosity in society.

Six months after Doug’s death, a skilled and gentle therapist, himself a bereaved father, greatly assured me by saying that I was just about where I should be in six months. I now understand that “just about where I should be” at any given time can be very different, but still true for each of us. So many factors contribute to our emotional state during this time: physical health, fatigue, significant dates, and our relationships with other people in our lives. An honest answer to “How are you?” might be quite different, but still true each day.

Four years have passed on now, and the question, “How are you?” is still asked. Sometimes I wonder how to answer. I know I feel better today than two years ago, though not necessarily better than I felt yesterday. I know the anniversary date that just passed was less painful than the previous ones. I am not certain how the next one will be, however. I’ve learned that healing is not a steady process.

To answer, “How are you?” or “How am I?” seems to require that I make some judgment about myself. Am I good? Am I not good? Am I improving? Am I better than yesterday? Or last week? Or better than some other bereaved parent? (Continued on next page)

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# Grief Support Group

Would you like support and help understanding your grief?

Join Family Hospice for a **FREE** support group on your journey of mourning and grief.



**Where:** Adams County Public Library  
128 South 3rd Street, Decatur

**When:** Mondays 10:00 a.m. -12:00 p.m.

5/09 Caring for Yourself

5/23 Guilt & Resentment

5/16 Anger

5/31 Reconciliation (Tues)

## Wings of Hope Day Camp for Children



Family Hospice is excited to announce Wings of Hope Day Camp on Saturday, August 6th this year! The event will be held at Ouabache State Park in Bluffton where participants will enjoy various activities, such as memory box decorating, music, and discovery games. Activities are designed to meet children where they are developmentally intending to walk with them through their grieving process. Please consider having your child attend even if the loss has not been mentioned for some time. This event is scheduled from 9:30am and goes to 1:30pm. More details to follow!

## Remembering Mom

A wonderful time of remembering mothers has been planned in two locations for those wishing to honor their mothers. Participants are encouraged to bring a scrapbook and pictures. Other supplies will be provided. Please consider inviting a friend or family member to join us as we spend time together designing pages and remembering mom.

Tuesday, May 10 from 5 to 7 pm

Marion Public Library

600 S. Washington Street, Marion

Tuesday, May 17 from 10 am to 12 pm

Adams County Public Library

128 S. 3rd Street, Decatur

*Both Presented by Angela Myers*

*Bereavement Specialist*

## Thinking about Dad

In an effort to honor fathers, Family Hospice will be coordinating the construction of "memory boxes" to be given to children and adolescents who have lost a loved one. These boxes will be a special place to keep cherished items which remind them of their loved one.

During the activity an opportunity **Wednesday, June 8 from 5 to 7 pm**

Marion Public Library

600 S. Washington Street, Marion

Tuesday, June 13 from 10 am to 12 pm

Adams County Public Library

128 S. 3rd Street, Decatur

*Both Presented by Chuck Vernon*

*Bereavement Coordinator*

# HOW ARE YOU? (continued)

I no longer feel the need to make those judgments. I am learning to acknowledge and accept my feelings whatever they happen to be. I've stopped trying to measure myself against some artificial standard. I try instead to accept myself as I am. I know I will always be different than before, but that's okay. I will heal, though at times I will not feel whole. The sun will shine, though the sky will never be cloudless. Life will be full again, even though a certain portion of it will always be empty.

Perhaps these paradoxes hold a clue as to why it is so difficult to answer the oft-asked question, "How are you?" It is difficult to be "better" when we know we will never be the same as before. It is difficult to know we are on the road to recovery when we have not traveled this way before and aren't even sure where this road leads. Accepting the fact that recovery is the road to be traveled rather than a destination to be reached quiets the nagging question of how we are doing.

Measuring progress is no longer important when I cease to strive toward some distant goal and simply accept the "ups and downs" of the grief process. This is not to say that I no longer feel anger or sadness or the longing for my son. I do. I simply try to accept those feelings as a natural part of my grief and not feel guilt about having them.

Those folks who are waiting for me to return to "normal" or my "old self" may not think I am making much progress. And, indeed, I'm not according to their expectations. I've begun asking, "Who am I now?" rather than "How am I?" and I'm discovering that "who I am now" can be an interesting and exciting process of exploration.

If you meet me today and ask, "How are you?" my answer will probably be, "I'm OK." That says it well. It says that I accept myself as I am right now. I accept my feelings, whether I happen to be laughing or in tears. I accept where I am in this grief experience, even though I'm not sure just where that is. I accept myself, though I am different from you. I accept my needs, my beliefs, and my values – even though they may not be what other people think I should need, believe, or value. I am recovering and always will be. I am not complete, finished, or recovered, but still in the process and that's okay.

"I'm OK" may sound like a simple, pat response to an oft-asked question. Actually, it's profound and filled with truth if you understand the struggle and the process through which it evolves. I challenge you to try it yourself. You may be surprised at the depth of its meaning. Then, the casual question of even a passing acquaintance will serve to remind you that, in spite of whatever pain you may be feeling at the moment, you are a person of worth and value. You are neither good, nor bad, better or worse. You are simply like the rest of us...okay.



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Compassionate Friends Newsletter

## Loss of Mother Poem

Now that I am gone, remember me with  
smiles and laughter.

And if you need to cry, cry with your  
brother and sister who walk in grief beside  
you.

And when you need me, put your arms  
around anyone and give to them what  
you need to give to me.

There are so many who need so much.

I want to leave you something – some-  
thing much better than words or sounds.

Look for me in the people I've known or  
helped in some special way. Let me live  
in your heart as well as in your mind.

You can love me most by letting your  
love reach out to our loved ones, by em-  
bracing them and living in their love.

Love does not die, people do.

So, when all that's left of me is love, give  
me away as best you can.

-Author Unknown

