



Spring 2011

## Grief and Loss in the Workplace

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Hospice House, 409 Jarvis Street

When you consider the long hours many of us spend with our colleagues, it is little wonder when loss occurs in our workplaces, we can be powerfully affected.

This may be a reflection of a close and healthy work environment or one where indifference and discord are more prevalent. Either way, we often are uncertain how to respond, afraid of somehow making it worse.

If the death is a patient or client we meet in the course of our job, we can be confused about our personal and professional boundaries, feeling overwhelmed as we try to deal with loss as a daily reality of our employment.

The good news is there are practical tools to help you manage the inevitability of loss in your workplace in a way that is respectful, compassionate and genuine.

*Compassionate End of Life Care and Bereavement Support*

# Loss, Grief and Healing in the Workplace



**Barb Evans-Ehricht and Anne Macaire will facilitate *Loss, Grief and Healing in the Workplace* workshops this spring.**

*Hospice Yukon has been contracted by the Northern Institute of Social Justice to deliver two workshops this spring, dealing with workplace loss.*

*The first will address the special needs of managers, as they seek to balance the work requirements with the needs of a grieving staff.*

*The second will focus on staff who are touched by loss in the course of their daily job. It may be their patients or clients who are dying, as in the case of physicians, nurses or staff who work in extended care. Or it may also be where the loss is less evident but still very real, as in the justice, social services or addictions fields.*

## **Loss, Grief and Healing in the Workplace: Practical Tools for Managers, Monday May 9 & Tuesday May 10.**

This two day workshop will explore the unique challenges faced by managers and supervisors in supporting staff when loss occurs in the workplace.

As a manager, balancing the work requirements with the very human needs of grieving people may be one of the most difficult tasks you will encounter. The complex issue of loss in the workplace will be explored, while developing effective and concrete tools to help you provide leadership in a time of great sadness and stress.

This workshop will invite you to participate in a variety of interactive sessions, developing skills, techniques and strategies that will be applicable and relevant in your own workplace. You will enhance your knowledge of the nature of grief and its specific challenges within a work environment, learn from your colleagues in other managerial roles and explore the importance of self-care for your staff and for yourself.

## **Loss, Grief and Healing in the Workplace for Frontline Staff, Wednesday, May 18 and Thursday, May 19.**

This workshop will explore the challenge of loss in the workplace. It may be related to a client or patient, or the sudden death or terminal illness of a colleague or a family member. Those individuals who are front-line staff, typically involved with client service delivery may find this workshop especially valuable.

Over two days, you will come to know more about grief and how to manage it in a work setting. Special emphasis will be given to maintaining your own good health, while working in an environment where loss can be a recurring theme.



# Sometimes, My Heart Goes Numb

We have all heard the flight attendants say;

*"In the unlikely event of a sudden loss of cabin pressure, oxygen masks will drop from the compartment above. Place the mask over your nose and mouth and breathe normally. Please put on your own mask before attempting to assist others."*

This makes obvious good sense to us on airplanes, so why the reluctance down here on the ground, to recognize that caring for ourselves is fundamental to caring well for others? Our North American culture is quick to reward *toughness and grit, not being a wimp and carrying your end of the stick*. We are less inclined to be understanding about our common frailties, perhaps precisely because they remind us of our own losses and dark days.

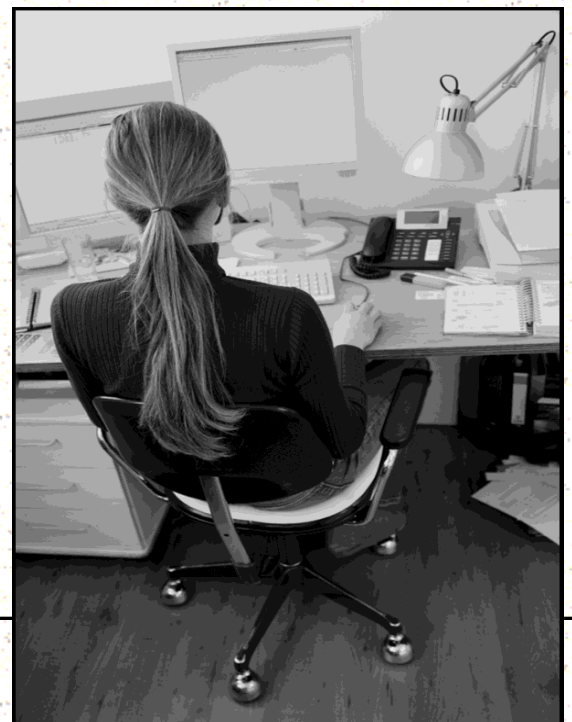
The following excerpt from *"Sometimes, My Heart Goes Numb"* by Charles Garfield and Cindy Spring, explores a little of this critical aspect of workplace health.

*It doesn't make any sense that caregivers be less committed to their own health than to the health of their clients or patients. And yet, caregivers sometimes entertain the peculiar notion that self-depleting sacrifice, particularly the sacrifice of one's own health, is all right if it can be construed to be in the service of someone else.*

*A caregiver's self-depleting sacrifice, especially of his or her health, is not all right and doesn't serve anybody. In fact, caregivers must be especially vigilant because some of the stressors that afflict them are frequently insidiously subtle. They creep up on us disguised as a bad day or irritability, but they can be more than that, and once entrenched become more and more difficult to shake.*

*There's a debate among caregivers and caregiver supervisors about whether a careful, considered focus on one's own well-being isn't really the equivalent of selfishness; about whether asking another caregiver to lend a hand doesn't demonstrate flagging commitment on your part; about whether taking a workshop in self-care or seeking counseling isn't an admission of weakness or lack of ability. It's not. It doesn't. It's only smart.*

*The alternative to burnout, compassion fatigue, and the symptoms of chronic trauma that often confront caregivers is self-care. You may not have thought much about self-care before you got involved in your work. All that has changed. Now it becomes a priority.*



# Jennifer Groot - Heritage North Funeral Home



**Heritage North Funeral Home Staff Krystal Olito,  
Chris Thompson and Jennifer Groot**

Working at a funeral home in a small community has all sorts of challenges. We are not only working with the families and friends who are dealing with the death of their loved one; we are also dealing with our own selves and our own issues of grief and loss.

Many a time one of us knows the person who has died or a family member of that person. Sometimes death triggers our own stories of loss and grief. Sometimes a death is so sad or so tragic that we cannot help feeling our own sorrow for this situation. Often we can work through our own emotions by spending these few significant days with a family and witnessing their journey to a more peaceful place.

A challenge we face here, is that all of our work is confidential. We cannot go home and talk to our family and friends about what happens at work. This leads us to depend very much on each other for support—and one thing stands out: we are all very different individuals who operate in very different ways. We see this in the grieving people who come through our front door, all of whom are experiencing this time of death and grief in their own way. And we certainly experience it daily with each other!

These differences can be a source of great amusement to us, as well as a source of frustration and wonder. But they also allow us to offer our diverse knowledge, skills and support to both our work and to each other; knowing we can count on our coworkers to be there for us in whatever way they can be. In this area, we are very respectful of each others different needs and will do our best to fill that need. If we did not have this level of support in our workplace, none of us would last long. And when we are at our best, we feel part of a well orchestrated and compassionate dance that understands perfectly what role each person is playing. That in turn allows us to offer the very best of ourselves in providing service to others and honouring their path.

Our biggest emotional outlet is debriefing. We give each other lots of opportunity to talk about a situation, talk about what happened and share feelings and perspectives. Sometimes we go over the smallest details, sometimes we talk about events over and over, and sometimes we use a lot of dark humour to cope. Often a sign that we have closure is that the need to talk about it has gone away.

We also know we have a responsibility to ourselves to be aware of our own stories and emotions and take the necessary steps for self care. This is different for all of us whether it is physical exercise, being in nature, socializing, being grateful, spirituality, spending family time, quiet time, hobbies or laughing lots. We know that if we cannot remain balanced, we will burn out.

Daily at our workplace, we are reminded how death is the companion of life, and to take each day as a gift. We don't sweat the small stuff as much, and have a different perspective on what is important. We all love our work. We consciously create and uphold the workplace we want to be in and fully realize that this is up to us to do.

## Patrícia Fortier — Child Services



**Reid Parent skipping stones**

On Sunday November the 14<sup>th</sup> 2010, I received a phone call that stopped my heart and changed the life of a colleague forever. An RCMP officer who had previously worked with me at Yukon Family and Children's Services called to say that a co-worker, Daisy Lemphers was about to be told that her son, Reid, had been killed in a motor vehicle accident.

I am sure that everyone who is called upon at that moment feels an almost paralyzing helplessness. What could I do, who could help, who should know?

Be there. Be with your friend or co-worker. I called a colleague from our office who has been a close friend to Daisy for many years and we met the RCMP at her door. That evening was a blur of details, immediate plans, disbelief and raw grief. How could this happen to someone who had not yet lived his life?

As the Manager of Unit in which Daisy worked, for much of the next day at work I told staff who had worked with and loved Daisy about her tragedy. People remembered her with her young family; they recounted stories she told us about Reid as he grew up. And many contemplated what their pain would be like if it happened to them. There was an atmosphere of disbelief and mourning for a life cut short and a mother who had lost her child. We felt our own fear that this could so easily happen to our own families. We made calls home to say 'I love you' and 'be careful'. We tried to find comfort in being together, knowing the depth of love we shared for our friend and colleague.

Staff work at Family and Children's Services because they care. Our caring motivates us and gives us strength. We talked and we listened to each other. This was happening to our friend; it was happening to us. We eased our feelings of sadness and helplessness with practical thoughts; colleagues covered Daisy's caseload, contact with Daisy was maintained and conveyed by her close friend, and the nurturing tradition of providing meals was taken up by co-workers.

Daisy wanted to have a say in all matters and she travelled "Out of Territory" to close details of Reid's life in his community. A first Celebration of Life was held on Salt Spring Island and then Daisy returned to us, bringing her son home. She talked to friends and came into work to see her colleagues. She showed us her grief and shared her thoughts and memories that gave her peace. She understood that her friends and Reid's friends were awkward with their words and Daisy opened the conversations, she spoke openly and honestly from her heart. Every detail of the upcoming Celebration of Life was important to her. She taught us that this wasn't something that happened to her, she was a living participant in this part of her life. (continued on next page)



## Patricia Fortier, continued

Daisy's strength through this was also nurtured by her involvement with the experienced and professional caregivers at Hospice Yukon. She accessed their resources by participating in sessions with a grief counsellor, receiving services of Healing Touch practitioners and made use of meditative and reflective reading materials. Daisy found comfort through Hospice Yukon, and in reflection, their services for co-workers would have been a significant support for her colleagues.



In telling this story, one part of the 'assignment' was to highlight those things that best supported the loss, grief and healing in the workplace. For us, it was our openness and sharing that helped the most. We felt and expressed our pain with each other. Secondly, we needed to be actively involved in helping; Daisy opened herself to this expression of our caring.

In concluding this story, I have to say that everyone who committed a loving action was a hero. I also know that the greatest hero of this story is Daisy. She graciously accepted our love and help, she shared her raw pain, and even in early days she showed us that healing would happen. We are blessed to have her as a teacher, a colleague and a friend.

### *Thank you...*

#### **Holland America**

Again our sincere thanks to **Holland America**, who have generously supported our resource library for many years —their big tour buses pulling into town are another sure sign we are through another winter! The Westmark Hotel lends their support to many charitable associations. Annually they also loan us tablecloths for our Lights of Life display at the Elijah Smith Building.

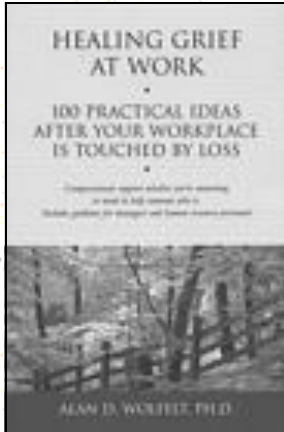
#### **Macaulay Lodge Residents & Staff**

In March, we received a visit from the newest contributors to our Feelie Hearts at Hospice. Maureen, Mary and Laura, along with Penny and Lindsay, from Macaulay Lodge delivered 46 unique Feelie Hearts—several with wonderful embellishments such as beads and buttons.

It was great to meet everyone and to know that we have new crafters out there who will continue to keep the energy rolling with our special hand made hearts. (photo: Laura & Suzanne)



# Hospice Yukon Library Resources



## Healing Grief at Work: 100 Practical Ideas After Your Workplace is Touched by Grief, Dr. Alan Wolfelt

*"It's high time to write a new narrative for grief in the workplace" writes Dr. Wolfelt. "We must reestablish a workplace culture that is more understanding, compassionate and supportive of grief."*

Here are some important misconceptions about grief at work:

- ***Grief and mourning are the same thing*** ..... grief is what a person feels, mourning is *the expression* of those feelings. Everyone grieves when they lose someone they love, but to heal, they must also do the work of mourning.
- ***We only grieve and mourn the specific loss***..... When someone dies, we are grieving not only the loss of them as an individual, but also the associated losses—for example the loss of security, of future dreams or plans or loss of companionship or identity.
- ***Grief is an emotional response***..... It can also be physical, spiritual, social or cognitive.
- ***Grief and mourning proceed in predictable, orderly stages***..... Grief is neither of those things—it is more like an unpredictable wave, flowing, ebbing and changing.
- ***"Grief work" should be done at home, in private***..... It's not possible to turn emotions on and off or relegate them to home. We need to find ways to support grief in the workplace.

### Lending Library

Grief Education Workshops

Palliative & Vigiling Support

Healing Touch

Bereavement Lay Counseling:  
One to One, Family & Group Sessions

Grief Groups:  
Discussion, Walking,  
Art/Journaling Day

Support to Care Professionals

*You are invited:*

**Hospice Yukon AGM**

**&**

**Volunteer Appreciation Dinner**

**Monday May 2nd**

**5:30 Dinner**

**6:30 AGM**

**Golden Age Society Centre**

**RSVP 667 7429**

# Grief Support Groups and Public Education

## Walking Group

*~ talk and walk in the  
summer and fall ~*



## *JOIN OUR SPRING GRIEF SUPPORT WALKING GROUP!*

**Tuesday evenings** along the Millennium Trail  
beginning May 31st, June 7th, 14th, 21st and 28th  
from 6:45 - 8:30. To register, phone 667-7429.

*"Felt comforting to be out in nature with people going through  
a similar loss. Thank you so much."*

***\*\*\*Grief Discussion, Walking and Art/Journaling support groups are  
offered on a regular basis. Contact Hospice for dates.***

## **Living With Loss ~ Introduction to Healthy Grieving February, April, September & November**

When death and other types of loss touch us, our grief is often unrecognized and unsupported. This educational workshop gives an understandable overview of the grief process and is applicable to our lives on many levels.

The evening will include an overview of Hospice Yukon services, information about healthy grieving and the importance of self-care. You will receive a handout package that will be helpful to you and those you support.

Please be aware that this is a grief education session  
and not a grief support group.

Contact us for support, more information or to register.  
Please call 667-7429 or email [administrator@hospiceyukon.net](mailto:administrator@hospiceyukon.net)

You can also drop in and check out our great resource library at  
409 Jarvis Street, Whitehorse, Monday to Friday 11:30 am to 3:00 pm  
Facebook

[www.hospiceyukon.net](http://www.hospiceyukon.net)