

# Good Grief

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## Grief: A Labor of Love

It is hard to think of grief as a labor of love. For many families who care for and support a loved one during a chronic or terminal illness, daily living skills and events can reflect the love they have for the person who is ill. They often require special care.

Those born with physical or emotional challenges often require families to alter their lives to assist with the special needs of their loved one. And while they face many challenges and difficulties with daily living, the love shared within the family is often hard to describe to others. There is a saying that it is easy to love when the going is easy but the real measure of love is through the challenging times.

When the person dies, you grieve not only their death but the roles they played in your life. The experience and the intensity of the grief are directly related to the relationship you shared with the person who died.

It is hard for others to truly understand the grief experience until they experience the death of someone who touched their life

so deeply. The grief experience becomes a labour of love because if you hadn't loved so deeply, you would not grieve so intensely.

For those who had a loved one die after a chronic or terminal diagnosis, the labor of love started with the diagnosis and continued through the treatment process. Walking that journey and watching someone you love deal with an illness is part of the grieving process. You can't take their pain away.

An enormous lesson about the labor of love is from those who grieve the death of a loved one. Your grief experience is a testimony to the person who died. They touched your life so deeply that you hurt to the core of your being. And that gives a whole new meaning to the labor of grief.

Reprinted with permission from Grief Briefs, Fall of 2007, Jan Borgman, Bereavement Coordinator, Cincinnati Children's Hospital.

*soul2soul*

*on-line support*



[www.soul2soul.ca](http://www.soul2soul.ca) is a website for teens sponsored by the Bereaved Families of Ontario organization.

It was created by teens for teens and is a great resource to offer, when appropriate.

Here are some excerpts from the discussion pages.

"It's been over a week since Jules passed away. I find myself struggling with day to day life with the grief and sadness I carry. I'm hoping to keep Julie's memory alive and share in the sorrow with those who need to grieve. I find the words hard to express, but know with time, it'll get easier. I know Julie is always here for her loved ones even after her passing. Her love is strong and I will always hold it dear to my heart."

And in response:

"You sound like you are determined not to let this horrible loss get you down. I hope that you find ways to celebrate Julie - she's lucky to have someone dedicated to remembering her and celebrating her life and loving her."

Kids helping kids. Nice.



# Griefworks BC

A partnership between Children's & Women's Health Centre of British Columbia and Canuck Place Children's Hospice

Griefworks BC exists in partnership with Children's & Women's Hospital of BC & Canuck Place Children's Hospice to ensure that people in BC have access to bereavement support when & where they need it. Call 604-875-2741 or email [kjohnson@cw.bc.ca](mailto:kjohnson@cw.bc.ca) to reach Kay Johnson, the Director.



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<http://edreg.cw.bc.ca/BookStore/public/bookstore/>



## Question Corner

**Frequently asked when folks call in to Griefworks BC looking for something to help after their loss: How can I support my other kids when a child dies?**

When a brother or sister dies, a child begins a confusing, intense journey of grief while surrounded by a grieving family. The child doesn't usually have the skills to grieve in a healthy way. They depend on their parents to help them. Even though parents are grieving their child's death, it's also their job to support the other kids' grief or make sure that another trusted adult is doing so.

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To have your question answered or to submit ideas for future articles, information, etc., please email [person@griefworksbc.com](mailto:person@griefworksbc.com) or call 604-875-2741. Toll free to 1-877-234-3322 outside the Lower Mainland.



The night my brother Gabriel died I was at a birthday party which wasn't very fun because the water in the pool was murky & hazy & I couldn't see the bottom & I didn't get in.

I got a green balloon though. It was tied to my wrist.

And later when I went to the hospital & my mom and dad took me into a little room with flowery furniture & they told me Gabriel died I can't say I had a big moment of shock, or burst into tears, or felt like I was falling - none of that, none that I remember - & I didn't really do all those grieving things you see in movies after someone dies, like wear a black veil & hover on the verge of tears all the time, or hide away in my room.

In fact, I didn't think I really grieved at all. How was I supposed to know how to grieve? I was only just turned six.

My parents didn't go to that extent, but they were sad & sometimes grumpy or tired & it seemed like the two of them were floating aimlessly in a shadowy, hazy world - two dirt specks drifting in that pool at the birthday party where I got my green balloon.

The thing is, though - I didn't think I was really with them. They were floating - sad, distant - in the pool & I was sitting on its clammy edge, with cold toes & my green balloon on my wrist looking in, & not wanting to get in because I couldn't see the bottom.

For a long time I thought that was how it was - that I hadn't grieved at all - that I had only sat on the edge of the pool & peeked in, but once I was sitting at the kitchen table & my mom said Oh no, you were a scared little kid. You followed me everywhere You always had to have someone else in the room with you - even when you went to the bathroom.

And I remembered that when I had to go I would make Daddy come with me & lean against the doorframe, watching me.

And then she told me that I had told her, once, after Gabriel died about this dream I had.

in it someone rang the doorbell of our old house & we peeked out the little window in the door & there was a lady with black scraggly hair covering her face & we couldn't let her in, because if we did she would grow bigger & bigger until she broke the roof of our house & we couldn't let that happen

con't on Pg. 4

## In Memorium

Recent Honour Page Offerings



Nicolas Michael James Collins



Kristina Mary Basile



Baby Carson



To add your tribute to the Honour Page, click on Memorial Tribute on the Home Page or go to [www.griefworksbc.com](http://www.griefworksbc.com)



### Question Corner, cont'd

Your kids may sense that showing their feelings makes it hard for you so they protect you by hiding their feelings. If you see this is the case, arrange for them to talk with another trusted adult.

Your kids may feel no one else knows what they're going through or no other kids are grieving. A support group with other kids may help your child shed the burden of grief.

Your child may use **denial** as a necessary way to avoid the intense emotional pain of this loss. This means the child simply won't accept the death. They refuse to talk about, or even think about, it. In time, the denial lessens, then goes away. Be patient. Don't argue. Give hugs.

When a loved one dies, people usually are **sad**. When a sibling dies, it's intense. The sadness may come and go, lasting for short bursts of time. Help them express this feeling by making a collage of the sibling's favorite things or looking at photos and sharing stories about times you spent together.

After a death, kids may have **anxiety** about something bad happening to them, their parents or other siblings. They may also feel anxious about whose fault

the death was, wondering who to **blame**. Set aside times to talk about these worries. If no one's talking, it may seem that no one cares about the child that died or about the kids who are left.

Kids may get **angry** at the doctors, their parents or even God for not preventing the death. Many times this anger goes undetected because the child hides it. Be aware that the rage or hostility may still be there. If not expressed in a healthy way, these feelings will come out without warning or at odd times that don't have anything to do with the death.

As your child gets older, outbursts may become bigger and more intense. That's why it is vital that the feelings are expressed and released as soon as possible after the death.

If grief isn't expressed, the sadness could turn into **depression**. Signs of depression in kids are: changes in sleeping or eating habits; a tendency to be alone; low concentration; increased irritability, decreased energy. Contact your doctor if you're worried.

If feelings don't come out, they can turn into **physical** problems like head or tummy aches, restlessness, sore throats, or appetite and sleep changes. Kids may show unusual hostility and stubbornness. Physical activity helps.

### Survivor guilt

When a child dies, surviving siblings may turn anger & possible guilt on themselves, especially if there was normal sibling rivalry beforehand.

Before the death, they may have told their brother/sister, "I wish you were dead!" In a younger child, they may think their thoughts or words killed their sibling. This puts the child in a bind. If they tell their parents about their thoughts, they think they risk being punished.

To avoid punishment, they try to deal with it alone which can lead to behavior changes & emotional outbursts. They may begin believing **they** should have died or shouldn't have fun. They may seek punishment or think about suicide.

If the accident happened under the care of an older sibling, the sibling can feel huge guilt. Reassure them that you know it wasn't on purpose. Tell them people make mistakes & no one is perfect. (NB: If it wasn't an accident, seek counseling.)

Explain that after a death like this, forgiving themselves & each other is important. This guilt can turn to bitterness which is hard to get rid of. Talk about it & support each other. Sometimes the feelings last for years. Parents should regularly check to see how their child is feeling & help them talk about these feelings.

## Contributor's Column

November 17th (con't)

Mom said that when you dream about a house you're dreaming about yourself, and she said the lady with her face covered by black hair was death, and that I was worried and scared that since Gabriel died, maybe I would too.

I had been grieving in my own way but I didn't know it until maybe six years later.

I never ever told anyone that my brother Gabriel was dead.

I always told people that my brother Gabriel died.

I always thought *dead* was such an awful word much too cold, too harsh for such a delicate matter, like someone who didn't really care had said it. It had a finality to it - He's dead. It was the period at the end of a sentence.

If my brother Gabriel was dead, it meant he was gone forever, his ashes buried underneath a tree, and he was never coming back ever and I would never see him again.

But if my brother Gabriel died - maybe he hadn't gone completely away. Maybe if my brother Gabriel wasn't dead, but he'd died he hadn't disappeared forever, he'd only left this life and gone on to someplace else lovely.

The word *died* has a little bit of hopeful something in it, like a finger trailed soft across your cheek.

If my brother Gabriel wasn't dead, but he had died, I had gotten up from the side of the pool and leaned down and put my hand inside it, and pulled my parents out.

If my brother Gabriel wasn't dead, but had died, I had untied the green balloon from my wrist and my parents and me, faces upturned, had watched it float hopefully away into the broad blue sky.

**Julia, 13, is an award-winning poet and short story writer from Overland, Kansas. This poem is published in *Living with Grief: Children and Adolescents*, 2008. Hospice Foundation of America.**

## Upcoming Events

### Children Living with Dying

with

**Andrea Warnick, RN, BScN, MA**

Nurse thanatologist at Max & Beatrice Wolfe Centre for Children's Grief & Palliative Care in Toronto

**June 16, 2008**

9:30 am to 5:30 pm in Delta, BC

**\$175 includes meals & snacks**

**Register at:**

**admin2@lifeanddeathmatters.ca**

Adults struggle with issues when a child is facing the death of a sibling, parent, friend or their own death. Learn how to support kids & families in these situations.

**Children's & Women's Health Centre of BC Psychology & Bereavement Program** are proud to sponsor

Hospice of America's annual teleconference

### Living with Grief: Children & Adolescents

Wednesday, April 16, 2008 10 am to 2 pm

Chan Centre Auditorium  
4500 Oak St., Vancouver, BC  
(Children's & Women's Health Centre)

This is a 2.5 hour teleconference with international presenters followed by a 30 min. local panel discussion.

**For more info: person@griefworksbc.com**