



MISS Foundation

A COMMUNITY OF COMPASSION AND HOPE FOR GRIEVING FAMILIES

Grief, Holidays and Connection

Dr. Joanne Cacciatore's Becoming

<http://drjoanne.blogspot.com>

Grief does not discriminate, and loss will, eventually, affect us all. And for many who have already suffered loss, the holidays mark a significant and painful reminder of that person's absence during, what is culturally recognized as, a time of celebration. Often, those mourning the death of a loved one suffer in silence during the holiday, trying very hard to put on their "game face".

Yet, for some mourners, this forced inauthenticity may exacerbate their already fragile emotional state, making them feel disconnected from family, friends and other loved ones during the holidays.

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Dr. Joanne Cacciatore

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i carry your heart with me (i carry it in my heart)

submission guidelines

Want to contribute to the MISSing newsletter?
Send submissions to info@missfoundation.org for consideration. Thank you.

So what do we do as mourners when others, all around us, are celebrating? In my nearly two decades of working with and researching the traumatically bereaved I found some things which may help connect us deeply with self, other, and the natural world during what can be a very overwhelming time of year:

- 1.** Sharing your feelings openly and honestly with others directly may help them to understand. Sometimes, the process of discussing the loved one who died before the gathering begins can relieve the tension others may feel wondering, "Should I talk about this or not?"
- 2.** Rituals are often very helpful, especially new ones. A few ideas, for example, include lighting a candle and having a moment of silence at the beginning of the holiday meal, asking family members to make a donation to a specific charity in his/her name, setting an empty place at the table for him/her and asking each person to tell their favorite memory, volunteering as a family in his/her memory, buying a gift for a child the same age and donating it, and a craft-making project where family and friends make an ornament in his/her memory. This not only gives others permission to share their feelings but also brings people together by enacting grief.
- 3.** Connection with a support group in your area can be very helpful. Empirical research suggests that social support is one of the most important variables in helping grievers cope. There are many grief groups that meet in person and online. Even social media can be used to help connect grievers to one another.
- 4.** Get out into nature if weather permits. Take a walk, hike, or just sit outside. If that's not possible, then bring nature inside. Create an indoor window garden or a Zen sand garden. When possible, expose yourself to natural sunlight at least a few minutes each day.
- 5.** Move your body. Exercise, even just walking, can help increase positive emotional states.
- 6.** Practice intentional solitude using contemplative prayer, silent time, or meditation. Take a few minutes every morning and evening to breathe slowly and deeply, eyes lightly closed. Focus on the stillness if you can. Keep this practice going.
- 7.** Change your routine. From the small things like changing the music you play when putting up the tree or

or the meal you eat to leaving town for a planned holiday vacation, novelty can help us cope at difficult times.

- 8.** If you are spending time with others during the holidays, tell them in advance of your fragility. Let them know that you may leave early (it's nothing personal toward them), ask them if there is a quiet spot in the house where you can go to be alone if you need it, and tell them the ways in which you'd like them to discuss- or not to discuss- your feelings openly with others.
- 9.** Give others permission to talk about your precious loved one who died. Tell them what you need. Sometimes, fear gets in the way of others approaching the bereaved. You can write a letter delineating what you would like. For example, "Dear friends, At this time of year, we are struggling without our daughter, Jane, in our home. We know it is frightening but we'd like to ask you to talk about her with us and to ask how we are really doing. We'd like you to remember her in your prayers, and then tell us when you do. We'd like you to consider a donation to X charity in her name. Please send us emails rather than calling us. We find phone calls to be overwhelming right now. We'd appreciate help with meals during the week of Christmas. If you are able to leave a meal at the door, we'd appreciate it. Our friend, Mary, will be coordinating that for us. Please contact her at XXX-XXXX. Finally, we love to receive cards so please keep them coming. We love hearing your favorite memories of Jane. Thank you. We are grateful for your support, and will need it for many years to come."
- 10.** Finally, give yourself permission to take care of you and your family first. It is okay to turn down invitations to events, to cut back on holiday celebrations and décor, and to ask for help with child family members who may also be grieving. Eat well, get enough rest when you can, and watch alcohol/drug consumption. Stress, naturally, distracts us from self-care, so you'll need to be more vigilant during this time of year.

There is no question that, for many, grief and the sense of isolation and loneliness amplifies during holidays. These 10 simple strategies may help us remain more self-aware, self-compassionate, and feeling more connected to those around us who love us, to our precious one who died, and to a deeper and wounded part of our self. Together, connected, we can get through these dark days.

Register Now: April 30-May 3, 2015 - MISS Foundation's Selah Retreat

Register now. The next MISS Foundation Selah Retreat for bereaved parents will be held at the Sedona Mago Retreat Center in beautiful Sedona Arizona, April 30-May 3, 2015. We hope you will join us.

"...life changing, breath taking, heart wrenching, courageous, compassionate, connective, compelling...a path forward from deepest sorrow."

For more information, please visit our website: <http://www.missfoundation.org/retreat>
To ensure your spot, please complete your registration as soon as possible. Space is limited.



Please Help MISS during your holiday purchases

Each purchase you make through Amazon.com's charitable giving program (smile.amazon.com) helps the MISS Foundation. All you have to do is select us as your charity of choice!

If you haven't signed up yet but would like to, here's how:

- 1) Visit smile.amazon.com.
- 2) Go to 'Your Account' and select "Change Your Charity" under the drop down menu.
- 2) Type "MISS Foundation" into the search field to find us.
- 3) Click "Select"
- 4) Instead of visiting amazon.com for future shopping, visit smile.amazon.com, and your purchases will automatically support MISS!

Thank you so much for supporting the MISS Foundation this holiday season.



Charlotte's Precious Life

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Dear Readers,

As many of you know, the Kindness Project started in 1994 (officially in 1996) after Cheyenne died as a way to honor both her life and her death and to remind people to act with compassion toward others, including - or especially - strangers. Since then, approximately two and a half to three million kindnesses have been done around the world in memory of a child, brother or sister, parent, aunt, uncle, cousin, spouse or other Beloved one.

This is a very special call that I hope you'll share with many others:

With permission from her parents, I am tragically privileged to introduce you to a most amazing, beautiful, spirited, and precious little girl, Charlotte Helen Bacon, and her legacy of kindness.

If you know of any children, grieving brothers and sisters or other children, participating in the Kindness Project, please feel free to submit their stories of compassion and nominate a child for the Charlotte Bacon Act of Kindness Award.

To her family: I will never forget the little brown haired girl in piggies who loved all animals (especially dogs and especially pink poodles) and who had a zeal for life that surpassed her far-too-few years here on Earth. Thank you for entrusting me, again, with her life, with her love, and with the profound chasm of her physical absence.

Please, hold Charlotte, her parents, and her older brother in your hearts.

Newtown Kindness and the Charlotte Bacon Act of Kindness Awards were founded in memory of Charlotte Bacon, a victim of the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy. It was established to foster a kindness mindset in children and recognize special kids who complete acts of kindness.

Leading up to the first and second Charlotte Bacon Act of Kindness Awards events, we saw participation from thousands of children around the world. All children are to be recognized in some fashion, but the top award winners have been announced on Charlotte Bacon's birthday, February 22nd.

The 3rd Annual Charlotte Bacon Act of Kindness Awards event will be held again on February 22, 2015. We invite you to tell your stories of kindness and inspire others to do the same! Please send us your story of how you (or someone) has had the courage to Think Kindly and Act Boldly! before January 15, 2015! No kind act is ever too small! Read about last year's winners on our blog!

www.newtownkindness.org

Pieces Of Our Hearts

Dear Drs Hewett & Cacciatore,

What do we do when others tell us to "think positive" or that we can change our thoughts or that we are creating our own pain by not "just letting grief go?" I'm really struggling with some well-meaning friends and family who keep telling me things like this. Or to just trust in God. It's beyond frustrating. Help!

S.L., San Diego, Ca

Dear S.L. in San Diego,

We're very sorry for the loss of your precious loved one, perhaps your child. As you know all too well, grief hurts. It

softens over time slowly, but as long as we love that person we will miss him or her, and the grief will always carry some pain. That's okay, too, because to love and to miss our loved ones is deeply human. The Sufi poet Rumi once shared that the healing from the pain is in the pain.

Sadly, the reality of grief's pain is something that people in our culture try to ignore. Instead of embracing the pain of grief as a natural, normal, and necessary part of life, they want to "shake it off," "get back to life," "move on," and "get over it"! That attitude is everywhere, and there are at least two reasons for it. One reason is that people try to get away from emotions that frighten them. Death--and more importantly grief--are terrifying realities for many. Unfortunately, your tremendous loss and suffering reminds them of their own (and their children's potential) mortality and frailty. Your pain may well remind them of grief they haven't addressed in their own lives. Another reason that people may try to push away your grief, frustrating as their words may be, is that they may want us to be more like the people we were before the death occurred. That's not going to happen, as we're sure you know. Even when your grief is softened with time, the loss will have changed you in profound and enduring ways.

What, then, do we do when others' words hurt us in this way? There is no easy answer for sure. We invite you to consider speaking directly and honestly with the person, if you feel safe doing so. Sometimes, a direct conversation can be helpful. You may want to have a few sentences ready that you can use with people who offer this "trust in God" or "let grief go" advice. "Thank you. I know my grief can be hard to see, and it is kind of you to care about me" is one way to acknowledge their intentions while not letting their words make you feel guilty for grieving. "I'm doing my best in this difficult time" is another neutral expression that lets people know you hear them but that you're in charge of your own grief. Sometimes it can be helpful to let people know directly what you do need so they can be more appropriately responsive: "Grief is hard, but it's important for me to grieve my dear child (husband, sister, mother). It would help me to talk about him/her. Would you share one of your favorite memories of George with me?" Finally, sometimes people are just plain annoying or completely unhelpful with their comments. In those cases, your gentle self-affirming statements may not work to move the discussion to a better place for you. When that happens, you may simply want to say something like: "I know you mean well, but what you're saying is hurtful and not helpful" or "My grief is between me and God. Please don't try to tell me

grieve or how to have faith." The point, of course, isn't to push people away—because we need each other even when we don't always communicate perfectly—but to take care of yourself. However, you may not feel ready to do this, and that is okay, too. When you're not quite ready to advocate for yourself, you may find it helpful to talk with a well-trained bereavement counselor or other support person. You can find trained providers at certification.missfoundation.org. A support group may be a safe place for you to express your feelings of frustration and glean some ideas on how to navigate each individual interaction where you experience these struggles.

It certainly isn't easy to be a bereaved person in a world so preoccupied with the pursuit of happiness and that decries our valid, natural pain and suffering after the death of a child or other loved one. Please stay in touch with us, S.L., and let us know how you are doing.

We send our hearts to yours.

Dr. Beth Hewett & Dr. Joanne Cacciatore

Dr. Beth Hewett is a Compassionate Bereavement Care Certified Provider®, grief coach, and the author of *More Good Words* and other grief-focused books.



Dr. Joanne Cacciatore is an Associate Professor at Arizona State University and the founder of the MISS Foundation. Her newborn daughter, Cheyenne, died in 1994.



Congressional Update: Infant Death Research Bill Goes To President

The Sudden Unexpected Death Data Enhancement and Awareness Act passed the Senate and will head to the President's desk for his signature. President Obama has until December 31st to sign the bill into law. Obama sponsored similar legislation as a U.S. Senator so his signature should be certain.

Thank you to all MISS members who participated in the grassroots effort. This bill will set in motion for the Center of Disease Control and National Institute of Health to address stillbirth, SUID and SUDC in a proactive manner rather than data reporting.

The bill requires the CDC in conjunction with the NIH to establish data collection protocol and procedures that researchers and doctors to use to better understand and prevent these deaths. It will be effective immediately. The CDC and NIH will have to report to Congress within two years of its progress.

This is a very significant legislative, awareness and research victory for bereaved parents and MISS members who have spent the past 6 years following and supporting these legislative initiatives. MISS will continue to follow the law's execution and report accordingly.



Birthdays & Death Days

Bi-monthly Birthdays and Death Days are now online on the MISS website.

See the Birth Days

<http://www.missfoundation.org/newsevents/birthdaysthis-month>

See the Death Days

<http://www.missfoundation.org/newsevents/deathdaysthis-month>

Our Donors & Sponsors

We'd like to thank all of you who give so much to support the MISS Foundation

See our sponsors

<http://www.missfoundation.org/about/sponsors>

See our donors

<http://www.missfoundation.org/about/donors>



Parker Ortman Memorial Golf Tournament Raises \$10,000 for MISS

The MISS Foundation would like to thank Jeff, Kristina, Mckenzie and Gabriella Ortman for supporting our work, in memory of Parker. This year the Parker Ortman Memorial Fund raised \$10,000 with a golf tournament and fundraising event. The Ortmans' contributions have totaled \$51,000 over the past 5 years. Their support means so much to us as we continue to offer outreach to as many bereaved families as we possibly can. Without donors like the Ortmans, we could not do the work we do. Thank you!



Changing How Bereaved Families Are Treated Worldwide

With so few providers who understand the depth and breadth of the death of a child, the MISS Foundation & Center for Loss & Trauma have partnered to present one of the most significant, timely, intensive training programs in traumatic grief to providers around the world.

This training is for therapists, counselors, first responders, clergy, medical staff, hospice workers and bereavement specialists looking to specialize in a mindfulness-based, non-

medicalized, green approach (Cacciatore, 2010) to working with families suffering a traumatic loss such as the death of a child, including but not limited to perinatal death, suicide, homicide, terminal illness.

The MISS Foundation's purpose in offering this one-of-a-kind, specialized program to providers worldwide is to significantly change the way our bereaved families are treated after a child's death.

Through this approach, traumatic grief counseling is considered a sacred art backed by evidence-based practice in which the provider is "fully present" with the bereaved. Please share this opportunity with others in your community who may benefit. The 30-hour continuing education program has been approved to provide CEU's through Alliant International University (AIU).

Our next training Compassionate Bereavement Care® Provider Certification program is January 8-11, 2015. Applications are still being accepted. Only a few spots left.

Read more about the CBC program and apply online here: <http://certification.missfoundation.org/>



Help Us Win

MISS has the chance to win \$5,000, and we've made it to the final round. Now we will need help to become one of the final twelve recipients. Voting starts in January. We will post more information soon on the MISS Foundation website about where and when to vote. We need your help spreading the word.

"MoonShare is a division of Sugarlands Distilling Co. that helps shine a light on non-profit organizations seeking to better their communities. Our mission during the MoonShare launch year, 2015, is to provide monetary donations to twelve elected non-profits during the year, one each month."



Contact Us

1-602-279-MISS (6477)
1-888-455-MISS (6477)

Physical Address
77 E Thomas Rd #221
Phoenix, AZ 85012

Donations/Billing Address
Kelli Montgomery
c/o MISS Foundation
1700 Alcove Ct.
Austin TX 78757

Snail mail donations should be made payable to "MISS Foundation."

Email Contact
info@missfoundation.org



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