



Caring For Yourself

*As You Care For Your
Grieving Child*

HIGHMARK
CARING PLACE



*A Center for Grieving Children,
Adolescents and Their Families*



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Your Own Journey of Grief

The death of a loved one begins a domino effect of colliding emotions and bewildering changes. Many demands are made on you, on your time, and on your energy. It's difficult to know where to turn first.

In the midst of taking care of others who need you, your mind is reeling, and your own heart is broken.

Caring for yourself after the death of a loved one is a major struggle.

“When we mourn, we die to something that gives us a sense of who we are. Grief becomes a chronic bitter taste. The way through suffering is not to deny it, but to live fully in the midst of it.”

—Henri Nouwen

We have learned from parents of Caring Place children that everyone's journey of grief is personal and unique.

Your grief is unique. No one can tell you how to grieve, and no one can tell you the right way to care for yourself in your grief.

“This is my journey. I am the one who knows what I've lost. I am the one left to live this life. And I have to discover what's possible for me.”

—Caring Place parent

“I did not get over the loss of my loved ones; rather I absorbed the loss into my life, like soil receives decaying matter, until it became a part of who I am. Sorrow took up permanent residence in my soul and enlarged it. I learned gradually that the deeper we plunge into suffering, the deeper we can enter into a new, and different, life.”

—Gerald Sittser

You'll discover your own way on your own journey of grief, and you'll discover your own ways of taking care of yourself in the midst of your grief.

In fact, realizing that your grief journey is your very own and no one else's is one way of taking care of yourself in your grief.

Many people will have well-intentioned advice about how we should grieve—advice which is often a subtle attempt of taking away our grief and our journey.

In the end, we each have to discover for ourselves how to care for ourselves in our grief. What things to do and what not to do. Which people to be with and which people to avoid.

Remembering that you have to discover your own way, that there is no right or wrong way to grieve—or to take care of yourself in your grief—is a way of taking care of yourself.

“I am the only one who knows my grief, my feelings, my loss. And I have to discover what will help me on my journey. You can support me, but you can't give me the answer.”

—Caring Place parent



Experiencing and Expressing Your Grief

One of the ways you care for yourself is by feeling and expressing your grief.

You cannot get to the other side without going through the door—the fiery door of grief.

“The best way is always through.”

— Robert Frost

Feeling your grief—feeling your sadness, your anger, your pain, your broken-heartedness, your loneliness, your fear—is a way of taking care of yourself. Because the only way through the grief is to grieve.

“Tears are a visible testament to the enormity of loss. They are not cause for shame, and are never to be discouraged or ridiculed.

Stress causes imbalance, and crying restores it. Not crying does not make the tension go away. Yet many of us spend a large amount of time trying to hide our tears and sadness.”

—Dr. Frederic Flach

Clinical Psychologist at Cornell University



Compassion For Yourself

Coping with the emotions of grief as well as the changes that death brings can be overwhelming. You can give yourself permission to do less, to let some things go, to expect less from yourself.

“Grief is heavy. It can wear us down. It’s okay to be gentle with ourselves when we’re going through change and grief. We do not have to expect more from ourselves than we can deliver at this time. We do not even have to expect as much from ourselves as we would normally and reasonably expect.”

—Melody Beattie

The energy that it takes to grieve will legitimately reduce what you are able to do—physically and mentally—so it’s OK to adjust your own self-expectations accordingly.

“Compassion for myself is the most powerful healer of them all.”

—Theodore Isaac Rubin

“I needed to be with other grieving parents because they helped me to see that my grief could become manageable one day. They gave me hope that my life would once again include a connectedness to others and to life, a connectedness that I thought had been permanently severed.”

—Caring Place parent

Connecting With Others

Parents at the Caring Place have taught us that not only is everyone's journey of grief personal and unique, they have also taught us of the importance of "grief companions" who accompany us on our journeys.

"My grief was overwhelming me. I didn't know how or even if I could survive.

"What helped me, what I am so grateful for, are those who were truly with me in my grief.

"They didn't walk behind me, trying to push me through my grief. They didn't walk ahead of me, trying to pull me out of my grief.

"They were with me. They slowed down when I slowed down; stopped when I stopped; even crawled with me when all I could do was crawl.

"They didn't judge. They respected me and my journey. They were with me—right beside me.

"They were gifts to me. I don't know where I'd be without those who traveled with me in my grief."

—Caring Place parent

While no one can take away our grief, or walk our journeys for us, we don't have to walk the road of grief alone.

Expressing our grief, sharing our feelings with someone who listens and accepts those feelings, can help us to manage our grief, to help make the grief more bearable.

"You alone can do it, but you cannot do it alone."

—O. Hobart Mowrer

Caring For Your Children

What we have seen in Caring Place parents is that their parenting is important to them—important before death changed their families, and just as important after the death.

In the midst of your pain, you still focus on your children, supporting them in school, at home, in other areas.

No one knows how hard it is for you to do all that you're doing, but you continue to do what's best for your children, continue to be there for them in the midst of *their* own grief and sadness.

A part of caring for yourself is recognizing what you're doing for your children—especially in difficult times.

You're doing what seemed to be impossible. You're going on, and you're enabling your children to go on, and even to find moments of fun and enjoyment in their lives.

Just realizing what you've been able to do under impossible odds is a way of caring for yourself.



About the Highmark Caring Place

The Highmark Caring Place is dedicated to making a difference in the lives of grieving children.

It is the mission of the Highmark Caring Place to:

- Raise awareness of the needs of grieving children
- Provide programs to address those needs
- Equip the community to support those children who have experienced the death of a loved one

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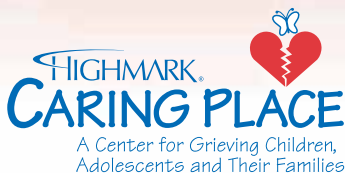
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