Healing Tears
by Pat Andrus

Do you wonder if the tears will ever stop? They steadily fall, unpredictably and unexpectedly. Like Spring floods, these human raindrops pool into streams then seemingly flow into rivers. Like Spring showers, they pop up, beat us down for a time, then just as suddenly, they dry up.

Often inconvenient and unwanted, these signs of mourning, sadness and pain also signify caring, love, joy and even relief. At times, we clearly understand their meaning in our day. Other times, nothing is clear. Everything is jumbled, confusing and meaningless.

Perhaps we just cry for no acknowledgeable reason. Is that so bad? After all, we’ve suffered a loss. Perhaps the death of a person or the death of dreams, hopes and plans leaves us feeling hopeless and powerless. Maybe we pity ourselves. Maybe we’re frustrated and powerless right now.

We know of others who haven’t cried, which may make us angry, worried or even jealous. Does it mean they don’t care, or didn’t care as much as we? Does it mean we cared too much, that we are too soft and sentimental? There are no simple answers to why some of us cry and others don’t.

We remind ourselves that tears are not the only signs of grieving. There are so many others. Humans are all different. Our closest friends and relatives will grieve in their own ways, with their own time frames, rhythms and patterns. Just as we grieve uniquely, so will they.

Others may tell us to stop crying, as though we can command nature to change course. How burdensome this is. We must, and will, cry as long as we need to cry, as often as we feel the dampness of moisture, as many raindrops as our body produces. Not to cry when our very nature demands release is to deny our humanness.

What we, and those around us, may not know is the healing physical nature of our tears. Our body produces tears for biological reasons. Chemically, the composition of tears of emotional pain differ from tears of laughter and joy or tears of physical pain. Tears help wash out negative chemicals building up when our body experiences pain or stress. Tears cleanse.

How many tears does it take? Why, just as many as are needed. Just remembering that there is a physical as well as emotional benefit to crying may help us accept our unique patterns of crying – or not crying.

No where does it say a person must cry to be healed. Or that we must cry in front of others. Some sob, others wail and keen; some remain silent, tears flowing inside. Some select the time and place where they will release the flood. Others find themselves incapable of controlling the tide.
Helping Children with Funerals
by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

A child you care about is grieving. If you, too, loved the person who died, you are now faced with the difficult but critical task of helping both yourself and the child heal. Throughout the coming months you will be both a role model and a helper to the bereaved child in your care.

One of the first opportunities for you and the child to express your grief is the funeral. This article will help you understand the importance of the funeral not only for you and other adult mourners, but for the children. It will also offer suggestions for guiding children through this important ritual in a healthy, life-affirming way.

The Funeral: For Adults & Children

Most of the rituals in our society focus on children. What would birthdays or Christmas be without kids? Unfortunately, the funeral ritual, whose purpose is to help bereaved people begin to heal, is not seen as a ritual for kids. Too often, children are not included in the funeral because adults want to protect them. The funeral is painful, they reason, so I will shelter the children from this pain.

Yes, funerals can be very painful, but children have difficulty understanding that life goes on. The purpose of the funeral is to help bereaved people begin to heal, and adults, too, have difficulty understanding this. The funeral is a time to say goodbye. If the body will be viewed, tell the child what spiritual significance the funeral has and that he may touch the person he loved one last time.

And saying goodbye helps us all acknowledge that life goes on. If the body is to be cremated, explain what cremation means and what will happen to the ashes. Be sure the child understands that because the person is dead, he doesn’t feel pain or anything at all during cremation.

Also help children anticipate that they will see people expressing a wide variety of emotions at the funeral. They will see tears, straight faces and laughter. If adults are able to openly show feelings, including crying, children will feel much more free to express a sense of loss at their own level.

And the Whys . . .

Help the child understand why we have funerals. Children need to know that the funeral is a time of sadness because someone has died, a time to honor the person who died, a time to help comfort and support each other and a time to affirm that life goes on.

One “why” children seem easily to embrace is that funerals are a time to say goodbye. And saying goodbye helps us all acknowledge that the person we loved is gone and cannot come back. If the body is to be viewed, tell the child that seeing the body helps people say goodbye and that he may touch the person he loved one last time.

Now is also a good time to explain to the child what spiritual significance the funeral has for you and your family. This can be difficult, for even adults have a hard time articulating their beliefs about life and death.

One guideline: children have difficulty understanding abstractions, so it is best to use concrete terms when talking about religious concepts.

Include Children in the Ritual
When appropriate, you might invite children not only to attend the funeral but to take part in it. Bereaved children feel like their feelings “matter” when they can share a favorite memory or read a special poem as part of the funeral. Shyer children can participate by lighting a candle or placing something special (a momento or a photo, for example) in the casket. And many children feel more included when they are invited to help plan the funeral service.

Encourage, But Don’t Force
Children should be encouraged to attend and participate in funerals, but never forced. When they are lovingly guided through the process, however, most children want to attend. Offer the reticent child options: “You can come to the visitation today with everyone else or if you want, I can take just you this morning so you can say goodbye in private.”

Understand and Accept the Child’s Way of Mourning

Do not prescribe to children what they should feel or for how long, particularly during the funeral. Remember that children often need to accept their grief in doses, and that outward signs of grief may come and go. It is not unusual, for example, for children to want to roughhouse with their cousins during this extraordinarily difficult time. If the child’s behavior is disturbing others, explain that there are acceptable and unacceptable ways to act at funerals and that you expect the child to consider the feelings of other mourners including yours.

Be There

Being there for the bereaved child before, during and after the funeral is the most important thing you can do to help. When we grieve, we all need support from others. But grieving children, especially, need to know they are not alone.

Physical closeness and comfort are reassuring to children during times of distress. What you say may not be as important as a touch on the shoulder, a hand on the back or a shoulder to cry on.

Remember to be a good observer of children’s behavior. Be patient and available as you allow children to teach you what the funeral is like for them.
Funerals: A Final Word

An anonymous author once wrote, “When words are inadequate, have a ritual.” For children and adults alike, death often leaves us speechless. The funeral, a ritual that has been with us since the beginning of time, is here to help us embrace the life that was lived and support each other as we go forward. As caring adults, we will serve our children well to introduce them to the value of coming together when someone we love dies.

The Language of Funerals

Remember to use simple, concrete language when talking to children about death. Here are some suggestions for explaining funeral terms:

**Ashes** (also “cremains”): What is left of a dead body after cremation. Looks like ashes from a fire.

**Burial:** Placing the body (which is inside a casket) into the ground.

**Casket:** A special box for burying a dead body.

**Cemetery:** A place where many dead bodies are buried.

**Cremation:** Putting the dead body into a room with lots of heat until it turns to ashes.

**Dead:** When a person’s body stops working. It doesn’t see, hear, feel, eat, breathe, etc. anymore.

**Funeral:** A time when friends and families get together to say goodbye and remember the person who died.

**Funeral Home:** A place where bodies are kept until they are buried.

**Grave:** The hole in the ground where the body is buried at the cemetery.

**Hearse:** The special car that takes the dead body in the casket to the grave at the cemetery.

**Obituary:** A short article in the paper that tells about the person who died.

**Pallbearer:** The people who help carry the casket at the funeral.

**Viewing:** The time when people can see the body of the person who died.

Related Resource:


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In Memorium

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Bereavement & Grief Support Group

Hospice of Salina will be hosting a 6-week Grief Support Group for adults. The goal of the group is to help individuals cope with feelings of grief, loss, and sadness in a safe and nurturing environment.

**Dates, Time, & Location:**

Wednesdays, 9:30AM to 10:45AM
June 7, 14, 21, 28 and July 12, 19
Hospice of Salina, 730 Holly Ln, Salina, KS 67401

There is no cost to attend. Registration is requested. Light refreshments will be provided.

To register or obtain further information, please call Hospice of Salina at 785-825-1717.

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May 2017

Resources

Adult Books

Author ..................................................................................................................Title
Harold Ivan Smith ............................................. A Decembered Grief: Living with Loss When Others are Celebrating
Doug Manning ...........................................................Thoughts for the Holidays: Finding Permission to Grieve
Thomas R. Golden ......................................................... Swallowed By a Snake: The Gift of the Masculine Side of Healing

Children/Teen/Parent Books

Earl Grollman.......................................................... Straight Talk About Death for Teenagers
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Maria Shriver ...................................................................................................... What’s Heaven?
Laurie Kransy Brown .................................................................When Dinosaurs Die

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