

Serenity

A newsletter for our donor families

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In This Issue

Our quarterly newsletter features inspirational stories of organ, eye and tissue donors as well as resources for Midwest Transplant Network's donor families.


Understanding Grief Within the Family2

What the Newly Bereaved Should Know3

Communicating with Transplant Recipients....3

Save the Date: Hope for the Holidays....4

Donor Family Days Recap

Midwest Transplant Network (MTN) recently hosted Donor Family Day events at the Kansas City Zoo & Aquarium and Tanganyika Wildlife Park in Wichita, providing a special evening for over 1,200 donor family members. Attendees enjoyed a variety of activities, including face painting, carousel rides and animal encounters with penguins, lemurs and a sloth. The events offered a unique opportunity for donor families to connect with each other and MTN staff, creating a memorable and supportive experience. 



Understanding Grief Within the Family

Adapted from "What's Your Grief?"

Grieving the loss of a loved one is an incredibly challenging experience, especially within the context of a family. The family systems theory offers valuable insights into how interconnected and interdependent family members are, highlighting the complexity of maintaining balance during such a difficult time.

According to family systems theory, families operate as systems where each member has specific roles and behaviors. When a family member dies, the entire system is disrupted. This disruption can lead to both dysfunction and a reconfiguration of roles within the family. Grieving family members often struggle to maintain their usual behaviors and roles, leading to a shift in family dynamics.

Birth order can significantly influence how family members respond to grief. For example, the oldest child may feel a sense of responsibility to take care of grieving parents, while the youngest child may require extra emotional support, feeling particularly vulnerable during this time. These shifts can create tension as family members may feel unsupported or forced into roles, they are unprepared for or unwilling to take on.

The age and life stage of each family member also play crucial roles in their grieving process. Factors such as access to support, past experiences, and physical




health influence how individuals cope with grief. For instance, children and adolescents may struggle to understand the permanence of death and need additional support and guidance, while adults may have to balance their grief with other responsibilities, such as work and caregiving.

Each family member's grief journey is unique, leading to different needs and timelines for processing the loss. Differences in readiness to talk about the deceased, handle their belongings or engage in rituals can cause misunderstandings. Open communication and patience are essential to navigate these differences.

Avoidance is a common reaction to grief, often misunderstood as a lack of caring. Many people avoid grief because they want to escape the intense and painful emotions associated with it. This avoidance can manifest in various ways, including physical reactions like fatigue or headaches, behavioral changes such as altered eating or sleeping patterns, and emotional responses like numbness or persistent sadness.

Developing reliable coping mechanisms is crucial for dealing with grief. Encouraging open communication within the family can help in understanding each other's needs and reactions. Recognizing that avoidance often stems from deep caring can foster empathy and support among family members.

Consider a scenario where a husband puts away a deceased son's belongings before the wife is ready. This action might be his way of avoiding painful reminders, not a sign of moving on. Similarly, siblings who refuse to talk about a deceased parent may do so to avoid triggering overwhelming memories.

Grief is a deeply personal and multifaceted experience. Within a family, it requires navigating changing roles, understanding different grieving styles and maintaining open lines of communication. By acknowledging and respecting each family member's unique journey, families can support each other through the difficult process of healing and adjustment. 

What the Newly Bereaved Should Know

Adapted from "What's Your Grief?"

For those encountering grief for the first time, it may seem darker, more confusing, and more frightening than expected. For those who have experienced grief before, the surroundings may feel different from what you remember. The grief journey is always changing, depending on whom you are saying goodbye to.


Feeling alone is natural, yet it is important to recognize that there are caring individuals who wish to help you navigate this difficult journey. While most can accompany you only for parts of the way, those who do appear may surprise you. Nevertheless, support is out there.



There may be moments when it feels as though your support system has let you down. It is important to understand that they are not trained for this. Providing honest feedback to those in your support system may feel awkward but will ultimately help you get the support you need. Lean on your loved ones' strengths and forgive their shortcomings when possible. If you need more support, look for options within your community, such as counselors or support groups.


Losing someone you love changes everything, but this does not mean that everything familiar is lost. While some parts of your old life are gone and others will inevitably change, some things will stay the same. The uncertainty about the future is unsettling, but it is normal for things to feel hazy. Many unknowns exist right now, but clarity will come with time.

As you become more familiar with grief, it may help to let go of any preconceived notions about it following a set of stages or a timeline with a beginning, middle and end. It is tempting to believe in something that makes grief seem manageable, but this will ultimately lead to feelings of inadequacy when we are unable to fit our emotions and experiences into a rigid framework. Grief is a deeply personal journey, and allowing yourself the freedom to feel and process it in your own way is essential to healing.

Grief will forever be a part of your life because your loved one is forever a part of you. This is the last, yet crucial, point to convey. Although they are no longer physically here to see, talk to, or hold, which hurts deeply, they endure in your mind, heart and spirit as part of your past, present and future. 

Communicating with Transplant Recipients

Midwest Transplant Network supports written correspondence between donor families and transplant recipients. The decision to write your loved one's recipients is a personal decision and completely your choice.

If you wish to communicate with your loved one's transplant recipients, MTN can help facilitate your request. For more information or to get started, please email aftercare@mwtm.org. 



Mission

Saving lives by honoring the gift of donation with dignity and compassion



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Vision

Leading organ and tissue donation through excellence, quality and partnerships

Contact Us

For more information or questions, call **913-262-1668** or visit **mwtn.org**

To receive Serenity via email or to unsubscribe, please send your request to **aftercare@mwtn.org**.

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Save the Date: Hope for the Holidays

Midwest Transplant Network's upcoming Hope for the Holidays events will be held at two exciting locations. The **Kansas City event** will take place on **Tuesday, Dec. 3**, at Union Station, while the **Wichita event** will be on **Tuesday, Dec. 10**, at Exploration Place. Please look for additional details and information about how to register in the Serenity newsletter this fall. 