



Grief Resources

by David Price

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Grief is a difficult and painful process. A major loss often makes it difficult, sometimes impossible, to function in many areas, provoking as it does mental, emotional, and physical reactions as the entire body responds to the loss.

At a time of bereavement or other major loss, it is important that one practice patience, allowing time to heal and experience change. It is also important to avoid engaging in destructive behaviors--such as overindulging in alcohol, drugs, sex, spending, etc.--as a way to cope with or escape grief.

Perhaps most of all, it is helpful to reach out to others for support and to express grief to sympathetic friends and professionals. Seeking support from others at a time of loss can allow grief to be experienced and released and can help forge rich connections with others by sharing a core experience.

There are many excellent resources, both general and specifically tailored for glbtq individuals, which can assist in the process of healing after a bereavement or other major loss.

Professional Counseling

Professional assistance can be extremely helpful after experiencing a loss. Major urban areas have counseling centers that seek to assist the glbtq community or community centers that can recommend grief counselors who work with glbtq clients.

In seeking a grief counselor, it is helpful to gather as much information as possible about potential counselors prior to the appointment. Ask if they are experienced in working with glbtq individuals. Ask if they understand sexual orientation and gender expression differences and are comfortable counseling within these areas.

There are many counselors who openly identify as glbtq individuals or who are glbtq-affirmative, and they often share this information with professional societies, glbtq organizations, or mental health referral sites.

Some counselors have religious views that are not supportive of glbtq individuals, and this issue should be explored with a potential counselor. This is especially true of religious counselors, including ministers, priests, and rabbis, some of whom support the practice of "reparative therapy." This unaccepted therapy, which has been denounced by the leading professional societies, seeks to change the individual's sexual orientation or gender expression and is potentially very harmful.

On the other hand, there are many affirmative religious institutions that offer supportive grief counseling. Metropolitan Community Church, United Church of Christ, Universalist Unitarian, as well as many individual congregations of other denominations and traditions, are just a few of the glbtq-affirmative religious organizations that offer grief counseling supportive of orientation and gender issues.

In rural areas or small towns, where discrimination may be more open and liberal religious resources scarce, glbtq individuals may find it difficult to find professional counselors and support groups who are knowledgeable about gender expression and sexual orientation, much less affirmative of glbtq individuals. But there are a number of other resources, including websites and books, that may prove helpful in dealing with grief, even if one does not have access to major metropolitan areas.

General Grief Websites:

An excellent website, ElisabethKublerRoss.com, was developed by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross prior to her death in 2004. The site has many excellent resources including newsletters, videos, referrals, and articles on grief and loss.

The Shiva Foundation, which was formed to open dialogue around issues of grief and loss in such a way that honors loss in the cycle of life, sponsors the website www.goodgrief.org. The Hindu god Shiva dances the cosmic dance of creation and destruction.

Griefsteps.com offers articles, books, online classes, and other resources.

The Grief Recovery Institute at grief-recovery.com offers information, handbooks, resources, and news to help individuals deal with grief.

GriefZone, at www.americanhospice.org, is an educational resource on death and loss that provides online articles and links. It is operated by the American Hospice Foundation.

Caring Connections at CaringInfo.org provides free resources on caregiving, finances, loss, and grief.

GrowthHouse.org offers information about end-of-life care, hospice and palliative care, grief, and related topics.

CompassionateFriends.org is a national nonprofit, self-help support organization that offers friendship and understanding to bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings related to the loss of a child.

GriefNet.org is a website dedicated to people coping with death, grief, and major loss. This site, directed by a psychologist, has over 60 e-mail support groups. Included is the support group KIDSAID for children dealing with grief.

Griefworks.org offers books, bereavement supplies, e-mail discussions, advice on ways to cope, and information on different types of grief.

JourneyofHearts.org is a healing place in cyberspace created by a physician who combines medicine, psychiatry, poetry, prose, and images to provide resources and support. The Supportive Care Coalition sponsors CareofDying.org, which has a variety of tools and resources and back issues of *Supportive Voice*, the newsletter of the coalition.

BereavementMag.com includes articles, stories, and poetry related to grief. Readers have full access to archived issues at this website.

Centering.org provides access to grief literature available online. Caring workshops on grief for adults and children are also offered.

Glbtc Grief Websites:

Alt.support.grief is a Usenet newsgroup designed to enable those who grieve from the loss of a loved one to communicate with and support others who are also grieving. There are specific glbtq support groups on the site.

GayandLesbianWidows.com is an online community that offers support, understanding, and friendship to gay men and lesbians who have lost a partner or spouse.

GROWW (Grief Recovery Online founded by Widows and Widowers) is an online haven for the bereaved developed by the bereaved. They help members after the loss of a loved one and offer *Rainbow Angels*, a glbtq chat room and support group.

AidsQuilt.org has hosted the AIDS Memorial Quilt, an enormous quilt made as a memorial to aid the celebration of the lives of people who have died of AIDS.

CenterforAIDs.org is an excellent resource for referrals, publications, and resources related to dealing with grief and loss related to AIDS.

Griefsjourney.com is a general grief website that offers special topics for glbtq individuals.

Mentalhelp.net has many articles and resources for glbtq individuals.

Gaypsychotherapy.com is a mental health-focused website that offers articles and referrals focused on glbtq themes and issues, including grief and loss.

Loss of a Pet:

ChancesSpot.org offers pet tributes, memorials, and online resources for grieving pet owners.

Petloss.com also offers ways to address the loss of a pet, including tributes and memorials.

GriefNet.org has an online support group related to the loss of a pet.

General Books on Grief:

The leading experts on the stages of grief and healing, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler, wrote *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss*. This up-to-date book includes Kübler-Ross' landmark theory on the stages of grief but also has brief personal stories on topics of sadness, grief dreams, coping, children, healing, and sex during grief.

When Men Grieve: Why Men Grieve Differently and How You can Help, a guide written for men by Elizabeth Levang, shares the stories of men who have dealt with grief and loss. The author discusses the feelings of denial, anger, bitterness, and despair that can manifest themselves when men experience loss.

Glbtc Books on Grief:

The Loss of a Life Partner by Carolyn Ambler Walter addresses the loss of a same-sex partner. Her perspective offers insight into the unique challenges faced by glbtq individuals when they lose a partner, a topic that is rarely discussed in general books on grieving, with the result that the surviving partner of a

same-sex union is often neglected.

Detailing her work with many gay and bisexual men with AIDS, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross wrote *AIDS: The Ultimate Challenge*. This book seeks to bring meaning to the community loss of AIDS. The message is very gay-affirmative and sex-positive and offers a balance to the often negative messages about AIDS.

Stephen Levine has pioneered the use of imagery and healing in his extensive work with gay and bisexual men facing cancer and AIDS. In *Unattended Sorrow: Recovering from Loss and Reviving the Heart*, Levine seeks to balance the sorrow of grief with a measure of affirmation. He offers meaningful perspectives that allow healing. Levine's classic book *Healing into Death and Life* uses imagery and guided exercises to assist the individual facing an illness to regain personal control and guide their own healing in a powerful way.

Kevin Donnelly, in *Recovering from the Loss of a Loved One to AIDS: Help for Surviving Family, Friends, and Lovers Who Grieve*, offers rich information for those surviving the loss of a loved one to AIDS.

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Levine, Stephen. *Healing into Death and Life*. New York: Gateway Books, 1989.

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Walter, Carolyn Ambler. *The Loss of a Life Partner*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

Websites:

AIDS Memorial Quilt: www.aidsquilt.org

Alt.Support.Grief: groups.google.com/group/alt.support.grief/topics

American Hospice Foundation: www.americanhospice.org

Caring Connections: www.caringinfo.org

Center for AIDs: www.centerforaids.org

CenterSite: www.mentalhelp.net

Chance's Spot Pet Loss and Support Resources: www.chancepot.org

Compassionate Friends: www.compassionatefriends.org

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross Foundation: www.elisabethkublerross.com

GayandLesbianWidows.com: www.gayandlesbianwidows.com

GayPsychotherapy.com: www.gaypsychotherapy.com

Grief Net: www.griefnet.org

About the Author

David Price is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor. He has worked in the mental health field for 26 years and specializes in working with glbtq individuals. At the height of the epidemic, he directed an HIV/AIDs program. He has worked in many different mental health settings. He is currently in private practice, but also teaches college classes and presents on glbtq topics at professional conferences. He is author of *Finding a Lover for Life*, a dating guide for gay and bisexual men who are seeking to develop healthy dating skills. He has conducted dating workshops for gay and bisexual men nationally. He lives in Vermont, the first state in the U.S. to grant civil unions to same sex couples.