

Haven Herald



Anger in Grief

by Jill Bellacicco

Once the shock and numbness of grief wears off, what do you do? Denial of the loss is not an option and intense emotions that are both surprising and necessary can take over. When the reality of loss settles in, your world can come unraveled.

You may feel powerless and think that someone needs to be blamed: God, the doctor, the loved one who died because they were reckless or didn't take care of their health. Perhaps it was a friend or family member who let you down, or maybe you blame yourself. Regardless of what or who you thought fell short, you are angry about what happened to you, and that's okay. Anger is a feeling that is a natural reaction to loss and part of the grief process.

Anger may seem like a troubling way to feel at a time when sadness and depression can be overwhelming, but anger needs expression.

When anger is not released it can lead to rage or self-destructive behavior. It is important to see anger for what it is, feel it, and, eventually, let it go. Anger can appear to be a negative emotion, yet once expressed, can actually bring resolution and peace. There are many ways to cope with anger and it is important to find something that works for you. You may need to scream and shout or write your feelings out in a journal, but whatever you do, understand that anger is legitimate and you should not feel guilty for how you are feeling.

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Letter from the Executive Director

Spring is a season of renewal, hope and incredible beauty. We welcome it with gratitude after the cold days of winter.

Haven is a busy place at this time of year, as we prepare for our spring programs.

There is a lightness and freshness to this season, but for some it is a time of great sadness. Suffering a loss in spring or remembering a loved one who has died during this time of year can bring conflicting emotions. The feelings of grief can be powerful, and one that is especially difficult to cope with is anger.

In this newsletter we will explore the role this strong emotion plays in the grief process. Understanding and accepting all the aspects of our grief help us move through the many days of sorrow that a loss can bring.

Jill Bellacicco

*Anger is energy,
it cannot be destroyed or forgotten
It has to be converted.
- Leo Madow*

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Anger is an emotion that all humans feel and grief intensifies that feeling. Holding on to anger can also become a way of denying the fear you may have of living without your loved one. Ultimately, it becomes important to put some distance between the feeling of anger and how you respond to that feeling. It's not an easy process because anger is a challenging emotion. Recognizing the importance of anger in the grief journey will help you move forward, and, hopefully, bring you to a place of healing and acceptance.

What Worked for Me by Sarah Raison



When my husband died, anger was one of my predominant emotions. I was angry at *so* many things. I was angry that a phenomenal person's life was cut short at 36. I was angry that my children were left without a father. I was angry that I no longer had a wonderful marriage and life. I was angry that we wouldn't reach any of the milestones I had dreamed of: family vacations, anniversaries and retirement. I was angry that the death by heart attack was without any type of indication or warning. I was angry that he wasn't close with his family. I was angry that my family didn't understand what I was feeling. I was angry at people for saying all the wrong things. I was angry that I wasn't the same person I used to be because of my acute grief. I was angry that I couldn't be

the same mother I had been before his death. I was angry that it wasn't easy to find proper childcare for my children, due to their ages (two years old, and nine months old) and their health conditions (chronic asthma and life threatening food allergies to multiple foods for one; a congenital heart defect for the other). I was even angry that because the death of younger people isn't so common today, not many people had inexperience with it. I was angry that I was alone.

Initially, my anger was so intense that I felt I almost shook with the impossible injustice of it all. I had an ongoing need to be physical: I wanted to throw things, break things and scream. But I could never satiate that need because my children were always at home and I never wanted to frighten them. Sometimes I would scream alone in my car, and I often tried to think of somewhere I could go where no one would see or hear me go crazy, but I could never think of such a place. It felt like there was no corner of the world I could go to and release all that pent up anger.

Anger is, of course, an unpopular emotion. No one wants to be around an angry person. It is frightening and unpleasant. I was even afraid of myself; I had never realized that anger could be so intense. And I was afraid of people abandoning me because I was so angry. But this fear led to the cycle of further repressing the anger, rather than acknowledging that sometimes, anger is justified.

For me, the root of anger was the feeling of unfairness. We are all told as children that "life is unfair" but we don't really understand that it will be only mildly unfair to some and terribly unfair to others. Over time, I was able to acknowledge that my anger was justified, that life had been very unfair to my husband, to me, to our children. And I started to accept that there was no retribution for this unfairness. It just was. I also thought about the ways life *had* been fair to my husband; the happiness and success he had in his life. This way of thinking allowed me to start to absorb the anger, and accept life as it was.

One day, my oldest son, who was by then four, exclaimed (in regards to something totally unrelated), "Life is unfair!" And I said, "Yes, Jack, it is, but it is still worth living." In saying that, I realized it was what I had come to believe. Death is wrong and terrible and so unfair, and we have every right to be angered by it. That reality is its own entity. But life can still be good; it can still be worth living, by seeking out future happiness, joy, contentment, love, satisfaction, in spite of the terrible, unfair things that happen in our lives.

Speak Up, Mourners! What Makes You Angry?

Anger is often a part of the grief experience. My personal definition of anger is “simply not liking how things happened or how they are.” The anger in grief can be everything from full on “wrath” to constant irritation or frustration. Every mourner experiences their anger in unique ways and for unique reasons. Some of the most common factors causing anger that mourners have shared with me in grief counseling and grief support groups are:

- Anger at the manner and details of the death
- Anger at the person(s) you hold responsible for the death
- Anger over services provided or not provided during caregiving for your loved one
- Anger at God
- Anger at the loved one who died (feelings of abandonment, feelings that the loved one “gave up”, suicide, etc)
- Anger at the loved one when long held secrets are revealed (hidden financial dealings, infidelities, etc)
- Anger at yourself (regrets, guilt over bad decisions)
- Anger at how you got the news of the death
- Anger at family members for their responses, lack of response, on-going family differences
- Anger at the unfairness of death
- Anger caused by the losses suffered
- Anger at other’s reaction to the death, to your loss, to your grief response (includes well-intended or insensitive responses)
- Anger at Death itself
- Anger at having to go through grief
- Anger at dealing with all the consequences after the death (funeral preparations & services, legal paperwork, dealings with wills, inheritances, probate decisions, insurance, social security red tape, etc.)

This certainly is not an exhaustive list. In fact, you could probably add a few reasons you experience anger in your grief journey to complete this list. Take time now and think about what really makes you angry in grief and share those reasons for your personal anger with me and other readers.

REMEMBER: Emotions experienced in grief are neither good nor bad. That includes anger. In grief we can’t always choose what emotions we feel, but we can choose how to express those emotions. Choose to show your anger in healthy, appropriate, and constructive ways. Then expressing that anger wisely and in healthy ways will help you to heal.

Written by Larry M. Barber, LPC-S, CT author of the grief survival guide *“Love Never Dies: Embracing Grief with Hope and Promise”* Copied from <https://griefminister.com>



HOW HAVEN IS FUNDED

Haven is classified by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. It is funded mainly by donations from individuals in the community who wish to support our work and by those who donate in memory of a loved one. Donations are tax deductible. If you are interested in making a donation, please contact Haven at (703) 941-7000 or at havenofnova@verizon.net



Haven of Northern Virginia, Inc.

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Spring Schedule

Six-week General Bereavement Support Group

Wednesday, April 19 – May 24, 2017

7:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Six-week Suicide Loss Support Group

Tuesday, April 18 – May 23, 2017

7:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Six-week Widow/Widower Support Group

Saturday, April 1 – May 6, 2017

Time(s) to be determined.

Call or email Haven to register for the groups.

Drop-in Suicide Loss Support Group

1st and 3rd Saturdays of each month

11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Haven also offers individual support by phone and in person; please call to schedule an appointment. For immediate support without an appointment, a volunteer is available on a walk-in basis Monday through Friday between 10:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.

Contact Information

Haven of Northern Virginia

4606 Ravensworth Road

Annandale, Virginia 22003

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Hours of Operation

Monday through Friday

9:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.

www.havenofnova.org

Messages may be left on our
voicemail after hours