

Grief, Suicide and Significance in Our Club

Grief is a natural response to losing people we care about. It reminds us that *we all* have an 'unknown' use-by-date, which can be a shock - even when those near to us die of old age or after a long illness.

The shock hits harder if accidents or violence are involved; and harder still when someone we care for takes their own life. Suicide is the ultimate cry for help. The hard fact is that once a friend or loved one is gone, we can't help them. They are beyond our reach.

Grief may make us feel numb, or anxious, or even betrayed over questions we can't answer. Did we miss a signal? 'Should we' or 'Could we' have done anything to prevent this happening? Yet, with even the clearest hindsight we are unable to fully understand another person's thoughts or choices.

A funeral will celebrate our friend's life; who they were and what they meant to us. But, can I encourage you to be wise. Suicide is not the way to be noticed. We all need to be accepted and valued. The hidden danger is that people who feel overlooked might mistakenly think that suicide is a good way to finally get others to recognise them. This is a bad belief by any measure. True for anyone who commits suicide, everyone will recognise their significance, but they cheat themselves, for they can't join in the recognition.

Brief or repeated feelings of death can hit anyone who is depressed or is not coping. But suicide permanently shuts-off answers to problems that are 'temporary'. Always remember that, "Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem." All problems have a solution somewhere. For most of us though, it takes time, patience and work to find the solutions. And, we may need to be *bold-enough* and *honest-enough* to

Signs of grief

These pointers were compiled by Melbourne AFL Chaplain Cam Butler, after the club lost Troy Broadbridge in the 2004 Indonesian Tsunami. You may have already felt some of these, or noticed them in teammates. They don't come in any special order, so it's important to recognize them and respect them without trying to analyse them.



ask others to listen and help us. Living life with joy and peace is a gradual process. Remember it's not a *single* event or a solo effort.

Significance

In sport, we can see the scoreboard and the time-clock. But in God's eye life has no scoreboard. He loves us unconditionally. No matter how good or bad we might feel or be. Life has no time-clock either. None of us know how much time we have in this life. He just wants us to make the best of *whatever* time we have.

So what about our significance - about being accepted and valued? Looks and performance are easy measures, but they don't last.

Long-term significance comes through growing our inner qualities like love, integrity, loyalty and respect. These qualities come from 'who we are' rather than from 'what we do'. And they only improve as we keep using them.

Take time to see these qualities in those around us. Talk them up and tell them face to face. This alone will build everyone's sense of significance and personal worth. We can help each other tackle our challenges more confidently and with the honesty to admit when we need help. Life is too special for us to go all alone.

As we grieve, let's keep an eye on each other. Not just for warning signs, but also for points to praise. Then we can keep on making a positive difference in our world, with the determination to stick around and enjoy the results. Whenever they come.

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- Anger – with someone, or anger with God
- Heightened anxiety – nervy
- A change in how we understand our world
- Confusion – unclear thoughts
- Sadness and depression
- Sleeping difficulties
- Difficulties in concentrating
- Feeling unable to cope
- Guilt & remorse: wishing to change the past
- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Shock and disbelief
- Denial – it can't be true

Ways to show practical support for the next few weeks

- Keep using your friend's name naturally – don't avoid it
- Go easy on yourself – your body and soul need time to repair
- Accept help when it's offered and seek help if you feel unable to solve a problem
- Give your body rest. When possible, get to bed earlier
- Talk together with your family and friends – heal together – ask, 'how are you doing?' and don't feel that you need to answer or fix problems as heartfelt sympathy is all that's needed
- Be patient. It's natural to feel depressed for a while
- Learn to share your thoughts and feelings. Take time to talk, write (on Facebook too), sing, exercise, and give yourself some space to cry
- Good nutrition is important, so go easy on junk food and give alcohol a miss for a while

Strength through prayer during difficult times...

Prayer can help us let go of our thoughts or actions that could stifle our recovery. God can handle our anger, he doesn't care how religious we are, and he understands our struggle to express our deepest hurts.

His comfort also helps us to help others who grieve later on, without having to re-live all the pain we feel right now. Consider a few words of prayer...

God, we can't understand why our friend has gone, and we feel robbed. Help us to know your comfort and to know that you are with us and with everyone in our club. Help us to know when we need to talk about our grief, and when we need to be left to our own thoughts – so we don't slip into destructive reactions.

Thank you for your promise from Psalm 23 that even in 'the valley of the shadow of death we need not fear evil, for you are there with us.'

Please be with our friend's family. Help them through this difficult and dark time. Help us to listen and show compassion whenever they want to talk about him. And please comfort them and surround them with caring people who can travel this sad and lonely time with them.

Hear our prayer in Jesus name, Amen

If you would like to have a quiet chat or help your club, family or friends work through their grief please contact:

Your Club Chaplain: