



Brenda Robilliard – Grief and Loss

As a spiritual carer, supporting people who are grieving is unavoidable. In the Hebrew Bible, or the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, the passage Lamentations 1:12 (King James Version) says, *Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, and Job 6:2 says, If my troubles and griefs were weighed on scales they would weigh more than the sands of the sea.*

So a few hints, a few tips. Be aware of your own grief issues. Fresh grief is two years and under. So you may well be sitting there with grief issues.

Bereaved people have the functional vulnerability of an 8 to 15 year old.

First I will share what is **not helpful**. Clichés and platitudes such as:

- » Passed on or passed away
- » Slipped away
- » Kicked the bucket
- » I lost my Dad
- » Mum's gone
- » She's not gone, she's just asleep
- » She's behind the wall
- » He's in the next room
- » She passed

Use the word: He or she has died!

Platitudes such as the following are not helpful:

- » Cracking up
- » Breaking down
- » Falling to pieces
- » Falling apart
- » It's okay you still have your other children
- » It's just one of those things
- » It wasn't really a baby, only a miscarriage
- » This was nature's way of telling you there was something wrong with the baby
- » You can try again

Comments often made by **religious people** that are not helpful

- » You're a Christian and your belief will get you through this
- » There's a good reason for this

- » You need to get rid of these items that remind you of
- » In your line of work you shouldn't be here if you can't handle it
- » Buck up
- » Think of the kids
- » Every cloud has a silver lining
- » Everything will be okay
- » You can get married again
- » You have to be strong
- » I've been in your shoes and I know exactly how you feel. **No You Don't!**
- » Get back to work and get on with your life
- » You can have another baby
- » Try and not think about it
- » It's God's will
- » God needed another Angel in heaven

None of which are helpful!

The most common questions, in my experience, I get from the **bereaved** person is *am I normal? and will I ever get over this?* The most common question I get from **concerned supporters** is *what can I say? and what can I do?*

Then there's the big question: *sombody please tell me why?*

There are four categories of death:

1. Death of a significant person
2. Loss of part of self
3. Loss of external objects
4. Developmental loss

There is considerable overlap, so it's not only about death.

The needs of the Bereaved – I want to share a few of those with you:

Firstly, they need safe access to the body of the person who has died and a meaningful rite of passage – meaning a funeral. They need reality, they need empathy. Empathy is *Your pain in my heart.*

They need permission to cry or not to cry. Not everybody cries, but that doesn't mean they are not grieving. They need permission to stand, sit, walk and pace.

Reality, empathy, permission and



BRENDA ROBILIARD

Brenda Robilliard has been one of the Christian Chaplains at Westmead Hospital since 1992. Prior to that, she was a nurse at the hospital. After her now deceased husband's heart and lungs transplant at St Vincent's Hospital, Brenda returned to work there as a Chaplain. She is an integral person to staff and patients in the Hospital.

Brenda is famous as the Chaplain who provides people in pastoral need with a care bear.



there's the tissue issue. **Resist the urge to give someone a tissue** when they are with you and they are crying because, as soon as you do that, what you are saying to them is *I am uncomfortable with your crying, please stop!* If you don't believe me then check it out. As soon as you give a tissue to a person, they will apologise and stop crying. I have the tissues there, leave them to cry, it's okay.

If you understand the person, you will know how they grieve. Don't worry about the age, gender or religion, they will tell you. Each will grieve differently and they need time.

Rules: First Rule – Slow down, Second Rule – *There are no other rules!*

Grief follows the theory of chaos, are you comfortable with the BIG FEELINGS?

So how do you help the bereaved?

Be there! However if you are not familiar

Create a safe place to bring their loved one and their broken heart to share their story.

with your own pain, you'll have trouble with others' pain.

LISTEN: We have two ears and one mouth, so listen twice as much as we speak and remember we do not have to fix it.

- A word about **praying**: it's not helpful to presume the bereaved person wants you to pray with them. They may be very angry at God and they may not want to talk with God right then, so don't presume they want you to pray with them.
- A word about **hugging**: have you ever hugged someone who didn't want to be hugged? It's a bit like hugging a fence post. If you feel like hugging a person, check out who needs the hug! Touch can be helpful, but it often is also unwarranted and can derail a person from their grieving process.
- A word about **children**: Give them blank paper and pencils. They create the most amazing stuff in their drawings. That's how they express themselves. **Resist the**

urge to interpret what they have drawn, *Oh Billy used black so he's depressed!* No, ask Billy, and he will tell you *I used black because Jimmy had the blue one!* Ask them: *Who is that?*, what are they doing?, where are they?* Talk to the children about those questions.

When my husband was very ill and dying, my children taught me a lot. One of the most profound things was when they came home one day and said *doesn't anybody care how we are? I said what do you mean? They said when we meet anybody they ask 'how's your Father, how's your Father?' They never ask us how we are!*

So **what can you say?** How can you initiate a conversation with someone who has had someone they loved die? There is nothing you can say which will

you've ever had. Like a cut finger, it goes through stages and leaves a scar.

The stats on death are pretty impressive, 1 out of 1 people die! Death is a challenge, it tells us not to waste time. It tells us to tell each other right now that we love each other or sort out the other stuff. Keep short accounts with God and Man.

*Not only by the words you say
Not only in your deeds confessed
but in the most unconscious way
Is Christ expressed.*

*Is it a really lovely smile?
A holy light upon your brow?
Oh no I feel his presence when you
laughed just now.*

*For me it was not the truth you taught
To you so clear but to me so dim
But when you came to me you
brought a sense of him.*

*From your eyes he beckons me
And from your lips his love is shed
Until I lose sight of you and see Jesus
Christ instead.*

I close with a prayer I wrote, which I call *Reach Out*

*Lord help me build bridges to reach
out and touch
The lives of those folk who are hurting
so much
Widen my vision in service that's true
Love breaks down the barrier
That love comes from you*

*When someone needs me, Lord let
me be there
To listen, to love them, to show that
I care
Amidst daily strife Lord to
constantly pray
Someone will see Jesus in my life
each day.*

You can listen to an interview with **Brenda by Leigh Hatcher** (anchor of the *Spiritual Care series*) that was recorded in 2012 by Sydney FM station Hope 103.2 <http://hope1032.com.au/stories/uncategorized/?012/brenda-robilliard-hope-in-hospital>

make the person feel better. There is no script. A simple "I am sorry".

Then it's a ministry of presence, the fragrance of Jesus. Collective listening, open ended questions, *Who? When? Where? How? When* and if they ask *Why?* resist the temptation to give them your theological take on the situation, remain curious, rather than an expert. You could say, *I don't know the answer to that.*

Grief can be like the most powerful paper shredder, ripping records to shreds, so is grief's impact on our hearts and hope, at least for a while. Create a safe place to bring their loved one and their broken heart to share their story.

Self-care. It is extremely important that you look after yourself. It's vital for everyone in ministry that you know you are worthy of receiving that which you offer to others.

A cut finger is numb before it bleeds, it bleeds before it hurts, it hurts until it begins to heal, it forms a scab and itches until finally the scab is gone and a small scar is left where there was once a wound. Grief is like the deepest wound