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Member Matters Update

Great news! We'll soon be saying goodbye to Member Matters and hello to our new member blog—Member Pulse!

Just like Member Matters, the Member Pulse digest will come to you every month with links to great articles about emotional health, relationships, work and life, and wellness. With a fresh look and other updates, Member Pulse will also make it easy for you to:

- Read articles on your mobile devices.
- Subscribe to weekly blog updates using an RSS feed.
- Go straight to the articles you want to read—without logging into the member website.

We hope you enjoy the new Member Pulse—coming soon!

This Month’s Focus: Coping with Grief and Loss

At some point in our lives, we will lose something we care about—whether that's a beloved pet, a family member or a friend.

Mourning a loss takes time. But we can learn to cope with the pain in a healthy way. We can also learn how to improve our resilience since loss is a natural part of life.

This month's edition of Member Matters offers several tips to get through a difficult time—and emerge even stronger
Grief: coping with reminders after a loss

Grief doesn't magically end at a certain point after a loved one's death. Reminders often bring back the pain of loss. Here's help coping — and healing.

When a loved one dies, you might be faced with grief over your loss again and again — sometimes even years later. Feelings of grief might return on the anniversary of your loved one's death, birthday or other special days throughout the year.

These feelings, sometimes called an anniversary reaction, aren't necessarily a setback in the grieving process. They're a reflection that your loved one's life was important to you.

To continue on the path toward healing, know what to expect — and how to cope with reminders of your loss.

REMINDERS CAN BE ANYWHERE

Certain reminders of your loved one might be inevitable, especially on holidays, birthdays, anniversaries and other special days that follow your loved one's death.

Reminders aren't just tied to the calendar, though. They can be tied to sights, sounds and smells — and they can ambush you. You might suddenly be flooded with emotions when you drive by the restaurant your partner loved or when you hear your child's favorite song. Even memorial celebrations for others can trigger the pain of your own loss.

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN GRIEF RETURNS

Anniversary reactions can last for days at a time or — in more extreme cases — much longer. During an anniversary reaction you might experience:

- Sadness
- Loneliness
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Trouble sleeping
- Fatigue
- Pain

Anniversary reactions can also evoke powerful memories of the feelings and events surrounding your loved one's death. For example, you might remember in great detail where you were and what you were doing when your loved one died.

TIPS TO COPE WITH REAWAKENED GRIEF

Even years after a loss, you might continue to feel sadness when you're confronted with reminders of your loved one's death. As you continue healing, take steps to cope with reminders of your loss. For example:

- **Be prepared.** Anniversary reactions are normal. Knowing that you're likely to experience anniversary reactions can help you understand them and even turn them into opportunities for healing.
Plan a distraction. Schedule a gathering or a visit with friends or loved ones during times when you're likely to feel alone or be reminded of your loved one's death.

Reminisce about your relationship. Focus on the good things about your relationship with your loved one and the time you had together, rather than the loss. Write a letter to your loved one or a note about some of your good memories. You can add to this note anytime.

Start a new tradition. Make a donation to a charitable organization in your loved one's name on birthdays or holidays, or plant a tree in honor of your loved one.

Connect with others. Draw friends and loved ones close to you, including people who were special to your loved one. Find someone who'll encourage you to talk about your loss. Stay connected to your usual support systems, such as spiritual leaders and social groups. Consider joining a bereavement support group.

Allow yourself to feel a range of emotions. It's OK to be sad and feel a sense of loss, but also allow yourself to experience joy and happiness. As you celebrate special times, you might find yourself both laughing and crying.

WHEN GRIEF BECOMES OVERLY INTENSE

There's no time limit for grief, and anniversary reactions can leave you reeling. Still, the intensity of grief tends to lessen with time.

If your grief gets worse over time instead of better or interferes with your ability to function in daily life, consult a grief counselor or other mental health provider. Unresolved or complicated grief can lead to depression and other mental health problems. With professional help, however, you can re-establish a sense of control and direction in your life — and return to the path toward healing.
Your EAP benefits

If you are grieving a loss, remember—You don't need to go through it alone. Your EAP can help.

We're here around the clock to take your call, listen to your needs and give help or referrals. We'll connect or refer you to a professional who can help you cope with grief and loss, and more. Through your EAP member website, you can access resources to help you cope with grief, traumatic events and more.
Dealing with grief: confronting painful emotions

Sooner or later, each of us will experience that dagger in the heart called grief — and dealing with grief is a challenge like no other. How can you pick up the pieces, heal the wounds and move on with the rest of your life without feeling like you're betraying the memory of your loved one?

FACING THE UNEXPECTED EMOTIONS OF GRIEF

Edward T. Creagan, M.D.

As an oncologist, every day I see people who have cancer struggle with death and dying. Every day, I also see families struggle with the inevitable end of life — families who aren't really prepared for the avalanche of emotions that sweep over them when the final moment comes, even if they knew death was imminent.

I know how challenging and devastating the raw, intense emotions of grief can be, because it's happened to me.

I went for a run one frigid winter morning nearly 30 years ago. When I got home, my son, Ed, then 18, compassionately broke the news — my mother had died. Even though my mother had struggled with breast cancer and alcoholism, the news struck me like a two-by-four whipsawed across my abdomen. I felt drained of every ounce of vitality. It took all the energy I had to keep from slumping to the floor. As the hours evolved into days, it became exhausting — even physically painful — to make any decisions. Our family was completely unprepared for the feelings of confusion and disorganization following the news.

EASING THE HEALING PROCESS OF GRIEF

Painful as my own grief was, my mother's death gave me new insight on dealing with grief. Although there are no quick fixes for the anguish after a loved one's death, I learned that you can take steps to make the coping easier. Here are my suggestions:

- **Actively grieve and mourn.** Grief is an inner sense of loss, sadness and emptiness. Mourning is how you express those feelings. You might plan a funeral or memorial service, wear black, and carry a somber demeanor. Both grief and mourning are natural and necessary parts of the healing process after a loss.
- **Acknowledge your pain.** If you don't face your grief, your wounds might never quite go away. Accept that the pain you're feeling is part of dealing with grief and moving toward a state of healing and acceptance.
• **Look to loved ones and others for support.** Spending some time alone is fine, but isolation isn't a healthy way to deal with grief. A friend, a confidant, a spiritual leader — all can help you along the journey of healing. Allow loved ones and other close contacts to share in your sorrow or simply be there when you cry.

• **Don't make major decisions while grieving.** Grief clouds the ability to make sound decisions. If possible, postpone big decisions — such as moving, taking a new job or making major financial changes. If you must make decisions right away, seek the input or guidance of trusted loved ones or other close contacts.

• **Take care of yourself.** Grief consumes a significant amount of energy. Your will to live and ability to follow normal routines might quickly erode. To combat these problems, try to get adequate sleep, eat a healthy diet and include physical activity in your daily routine. Consider a medical checkup to make sure your grief isn't adversely affecting your health — especially if you have any existing health conditions.

• **Remember that time helps, but it might not cure.** Time has the ability to make that acute, searing pain of loss less intense and to make your red-hot emotions less painful — but your feelings of loss and emptiness might never completely go away. Accepting and embracing your new "normal" might help you reconcile your losses.

Losing a loved one is devastating. Someday, however, the sun will shine again. The day will seem brighter and your life will go on — even if it'll never be quite the same.

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Resilience: build skills to endure hardship

Resilience means being able to adapt to life's misfortunes and setbacks. Test your resilience level and get tips to build your own resilience.

When something goes wrong, do you tend to bounce back or fall apart?

When you have resilience, you harness inner strength that helps you rebound from a setback or challenge, such as a job loss, an illness, a disaster or the death of a loved one. If you lack resilience, you might dwell on problems, feel victimized, become overwhelmed or turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse.

Resilience won't make your problems go away — but resilience can give you the ability to see past them, find enjoyment in life and better handle stress. If you aren't as resilient as you'd like to be, you can develop skills to become more resilient.

RESILIENCE MEANS ADAPTING TO ADVERSITY

Resilience is the ability to roll with the punches. When stress, adversity or trauma strikes, you still experience anger, grief and pain, but you're able to keep functioning — both physically and psychologically. Resilience isn't about toughing it out, being stoic or going it alone. In fact, being able to reach out to others for support is a key component of being resilient.

RESILIENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH

Resilience offers protection from various mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety. Resilience can also help offset factors that increase the risk of mental health conditions, such as lack of social support, being bullied or previous trauma. If you have an existing mental health condition, being resilient can improve your ability to cope.

TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR RESILIENCE

If you'd like to become more resilient, consider these tips:

- Get connected. Building strong, positive relationships with loved ones and friends can provide you with needed support and acceptance in both good times and bad. Establish other important connections by doing volunteer work, getting involved in your community, or joining a faith or spiritual community.

- Make every day meaningful. Do something that gives you a sense of accomplishment and purpose every day. Set goals to help you look toward the future with meaning.

- Learn from experience. Think back on how you've coped with hardships in the past. Consider the skills and strategies that helped you through rough times. You might even write about past experiences in a journal to help you identify both positive and negative behavior patterns — and guide your behavior in the future.

- Remain hopeful. You can't change what's happened in the past, but you can always look toward the future. Accepting and even anticipating change makes it easier to adapt and view new challenges with less anxiety.

- Take care of yourself. Tend to your own needs and feelings, both physically and emotionally. Participate in activities and hobbies you enjoy. Include physical activity in your daily routine. Get plenty of sleep. Eat a healthy diet. To restore an inner sense of peace or calm, practice
stress management and relaxation techniques, such as yoga, meditation, guided imagery, deep breathing or prayer.

- **Be proactive.** Don't ignore your problems or try to wish them away. Instead, figure out what needs to be done, make a plan and take action. Although it can take time to recover from a major setback, traumatic event or loss, know that your situation can improve if you actively work at it.

**WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL ADVICE**

Becoming more resilient takes time and practice. If you don't feel you're making progress — or you don't know where to start — consider talking to a mental health provider. With guidance, you can improve your resiliency and mental well-being.

**Getting Started is Easy!**

Call your EAP for more information