

Dr. Hoy holds a clinical faculty appointment in Medical Humanities at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. A popular speaker for groups of caregiving professionals across North America, Dr. Hoy has counselled with people in grief and has worked with the professionals who care for them for nearly 30 years. Prior to going to Baylor, Bill directed the bereavement program at Pathways Volunteer Hospice in Long Beach California for more than 16 years. In addition to his university teaching schedule, he provides dozens of professional continuing education workshops and keynote addresses every year.

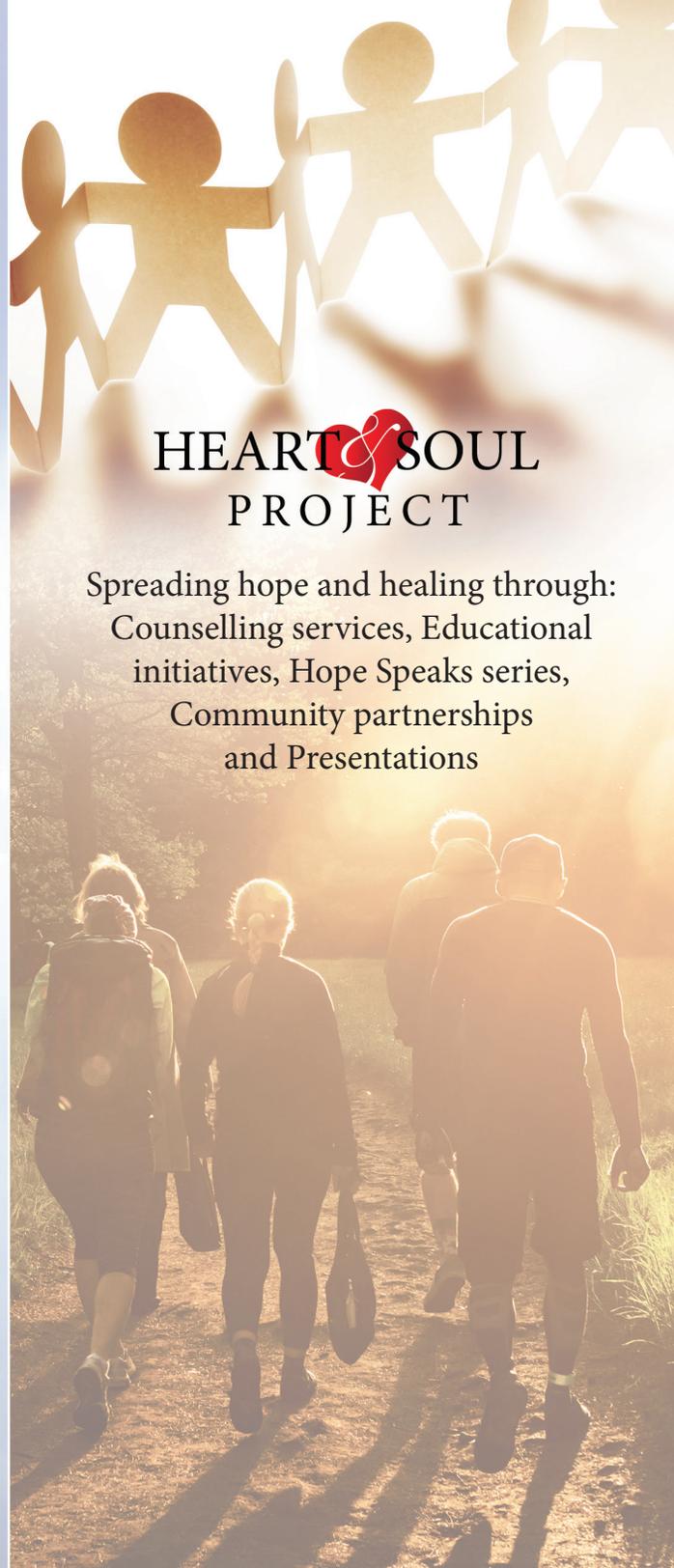


Dr. William G. (Bill) Hoy

Active in the leadership of the Association for Death Education & Counselling, Dr. Hoy holds the organization's advance practice credential, the FT (Fellow in Thanatology). Since 2013, Bill has served on the Association's board and in 2014, Bill was elected to a three-year term as the association's Treasurer.

Bill edits *GriefPerspectives*, an email newsletter read every month by more than 4,500 caregiving professionals and volunteers. His book, *Guiding People Through Grief* (Compass, 2007) is in its fourth printing and the newer volume, *Road to Emmaus* (Compass, 2008) is in its third. Along with Dr. Laura Lewis (University of Western Ontario), he co-authored the chapter "Bereavement Rituals and the Creation of Legacy" in the recently-published *Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society* (Routledge, 2011).

His newest book, *Do Funerals Matter? The Purposes and Practices of Death Rituals in Global Perspective* (Routledge, 2013) takes a practical anthropologist's look at the "anchors" present in funeral rituals around the world and throughout history. Additionally, he has written more than 100 journal articles and educational pamphlets for bereaved people and the professionals and volunteers who care for them.



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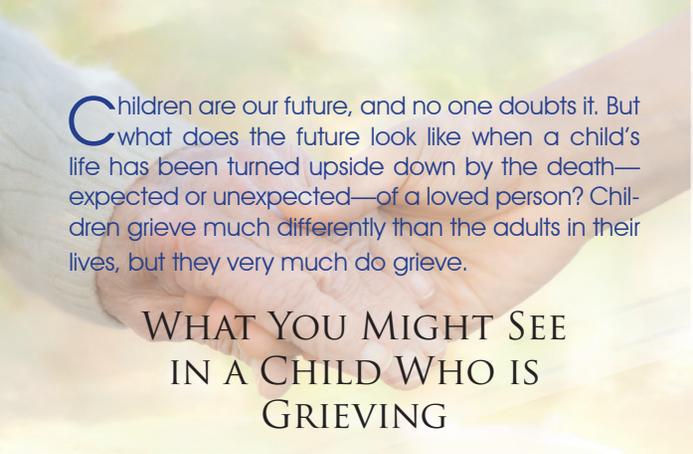


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Volume 2

WHEN YOUR CHILD IS GRIEVING



Children are our future, and no one doubts it. But what does the future look like when a child's life has been turned upside down by the death—expected or unexpected—of a loved person? Children grieve much differently than the adults in their lives, but they very much do grieve.

WHAT YOU MIGHT SEE IN A CHILD WHO IS GRIEVING

Grief is more than an emotion—it is a collision of every emotion a human can possibly feel, shaking us “from top to bottom.” You may be uncomfortable with some of your child's reactions, but resist the urge to try fixing him, because she does not need to be fixed—just loved and accepted.

Changes in behavior are sometimes pronounced for children in grief. You might be seeing more defiant attitudes or outbursts than you are used to from this child. While parents and other authorities in a child's life must set firm boundaries for behavior, it helps to understand the deep emotion out of which some of these may be coming.

You might also notice significant changes in a child's academic performance, especially related to the absent-mindedness and “lack of focus” common to people in grief of all ages. Simple tasks sometimes require much more time and one may start and stop the same project multiple times. In bereavement, this is usually less related to procrastination than it is to

a child's difficulty concentrating and the proneness toward “day dreaming” that is normal in grief.

COMMUNICATING WITH A GRIEVING CHILD

Carrying on a conversation with a child can be a daunting challenge for some of us, even when circumstances are perfect. But when a child is grieving the death of a parent, grandparent, sibling, friend, or even a pet that conversation can prove doubly difficult. Here are some strategies.

- When responding to questions, clarify what the child is asking. Ask something like, “Are you asking where Grandpa's body is now or are you asking what our family believes about what happens to a person after he dies?”
- Tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Human development specialist Dr. David Crenshaw writes, “Children can bear the truth, no matter how painful, much more easily than they can handle being deceived.” (from *Bereavement: Counseling the Grieving Throughout the Life Cycle*)
- Come to terms with your own attitudes about death. Sometimes, kids are much more at ease with the topic than grown-ups are, so be sure you are honestly facing your own anxieties and concerns.
- Do not try to shelter your children from the pain of this experience. At first glance, it seems reasonable to “spare them” from knowing much about dying or grief. What children need from you is a healthy model of how to grieve rather than an attempt to “protect” them. Allow them to see your tears and sadness, encouraging them to experience grief.
- Expect to repeat yourself—about a hundred times! As no surprise to parents, this principle reminds us that often kids ask the same questions over and over. Most often, this grows out of a need for information, so plan to patiently explain things many times.
- Prepare children to participate in funeral ceremonies by emphasizing the senses—what you will hear, see, touch, and smell for example. While children should probably not be either forced nor forbidden to participate in the funeral, they must be given clear explanations of what to expect. Clergy can



sometimes help with this preparation and funeral directors can help you find the words to explain funeral ceremonies to your children.

Most children deal in very healthy ways with death and grief issues when they receive support from caring family members, the school, and the faith community. Many hospices have programs for bereaved children and you may find your family's involvement will make the process better for everyone.

Make sure you notify people who are significant in your child's life such as teachers, scout leaders, and coaches. These people will be of great help to your child in the process of bereavement. One of them could likely sit with your child during the funeral to provide extra care and support to the “littlest grievers.”

Children grieve too. You help them for a lifetime when you help them learn to grow through their grief. Helping a child in grief now is one more way you help her develop a positive future.

This article was written by William G. Hoy, a counselor widely known to bereaved people and the professionals who care for them. After more than 16 years working with bereaved people and directing the bereavement counseling program at Pathways Volunteer Hospice in Long Beach, CA, Dr. Hoy now teaches in the Medical Humanities Program at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

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