

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.

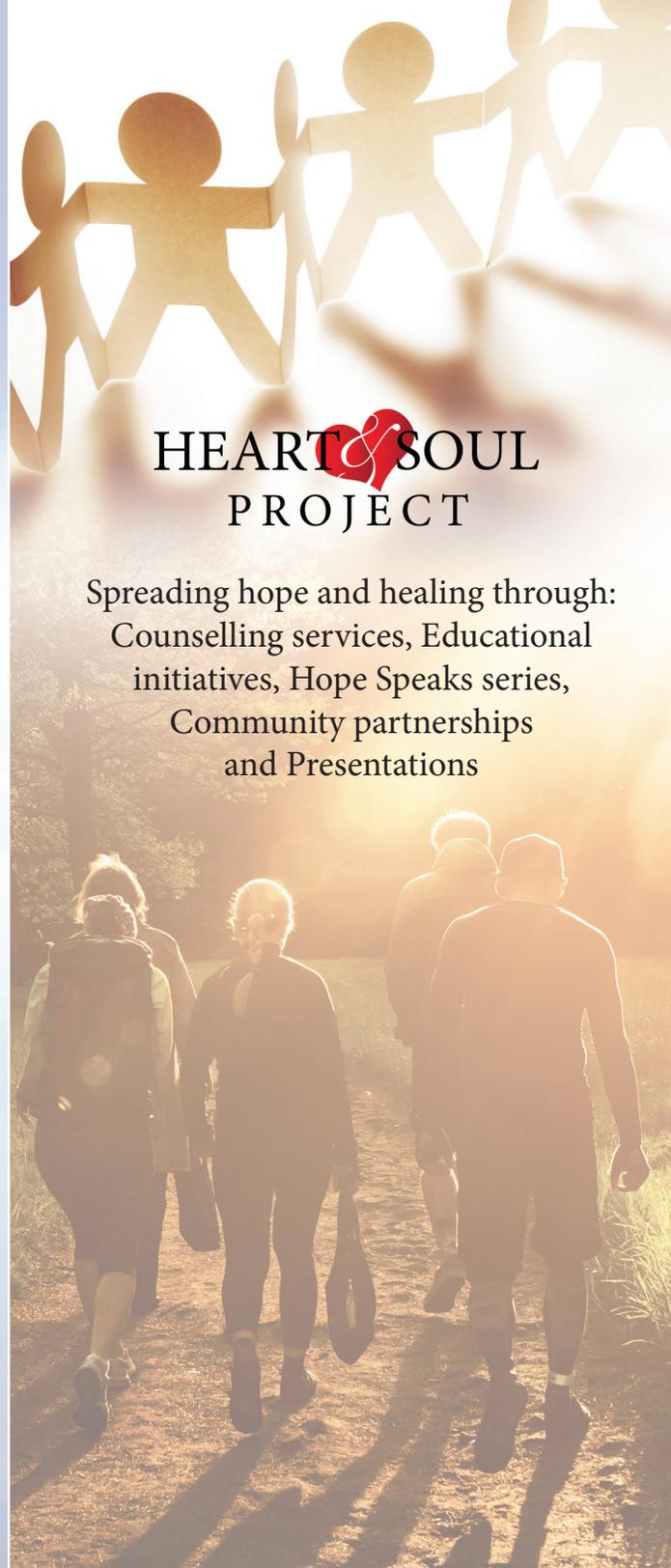


Dr. William G. (Bill) Hoy

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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Work communities are the “families” with whom we spend much of our waking lives. Thrown together because of the need to complete some common tasks, the people with whom we work sometimes become our most trusted allies and friends. That is why when a coworker dies, we live through many of the same experiences of grief as we would with any loved family member.

HOW GRIEF WORKS

Grief is more than an emotion—it is a collision of every emotion a human can possibly feel, shaking us “from top to bottom.” Especially during the early weeks of grief, you may experience the gamut of human emotion. Anger, guilt, sadness, loneliness, and fear are some of the common emotions of grief.

All these emotions and dozens of others are normal—but not everyone experiences all of the emotions. Grief is very personal so your experience will be somewhat unique from other people—both at work and at home.

While we often think of grief in emotional terms, it is also physical, social, mental, and spiritual. You may find yourself more fatigued than usual and dealing with sleep difficulties. Because people grieve differently from each other, we sometimes inadvertently expect our experiences to match those of other people. It rarely works that way.

Many people in grief report difficulty concentrating and “staying on task.” This blending of experiences is part of what makes it especially difficult when a trusted colleague dies—whether the death comes after a long illness or is completely unexpected.

For some people, the death of a work companion creates a need to reevaluate life’s purpose and priorities. You might wonder whether what you do is important and how exactly you are making an impact on the world in the job you do. In the next section, you will find some practical ideas for working through some of these struggles and questions.

WHAT TO DO NOW

Deciding what to do now is often difficult in grief. When a family member dies, the workplace is often a “refuge” from the emotional pain and turmoil of personal life. When work is a huge reminder of the loss, this escaping is not nearly so easy. These strategies will likely help you.

Practice making a “things to do” list every day. Listing priority tasks to accomplish makes it much easier to stay focused on your job and helps alleviate last minute project surprises.

Join a support group. In either the office with other colleagues who are working through the same death or in a community group that welcomes those who are reconciling grief after the death of a friend, you will find a mutual group of friends who are all on the grief journey. Check with Human Resources or the workplace Employee Assistance Program to learn about resources available to you. You can also learn about grief support groups in the community by calling a hospice, hospital, church, temple, senior center, or funeral home.

Reevaluate your life’s mission and purpose. Attend a seminar or read a book (such as Stephen Covey’s *First Things First*) for more help on discovering or rediscovering what you are hoping to accomplish through your life. The grief period following the death of a colleague is a wonderful growth opportunity for this kind of introspection. The internet is home to a wide variety of practical articles and tools for time and priority management.

Give yourself space and permission to grieve. While you must continue to work even after a colleague dies, and even though some of your friends, family members, and other colleagues will suggest that “you get on with



your life,” it is important to give yourself some regular time to write, reflect on your relationship with the person who died, and remember your loss. Keeping a journal, visiting the cemetery or other special place, and taking long walks can be very useful in this process.

Create a memorial. Contributing to scholarship funds, giving to charity, and planting memorial trees are ways to honor a colleague’s life. In cooperation with the Red Cross, one municipal police department held a community blood drive on the anniversary of a fellow-officer’s line of duty death.

Reach out for help. Even though grief is normal and natural, you might still find help talking with a professional. Especially if you feel your sadness is becoming a full-blown depression or you are thinking about hurting yourself, talk to someone. Your clergy, family doctor, local mental health clinic, or the suicide prevention center are all excellent places to turn for help.

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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