

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.

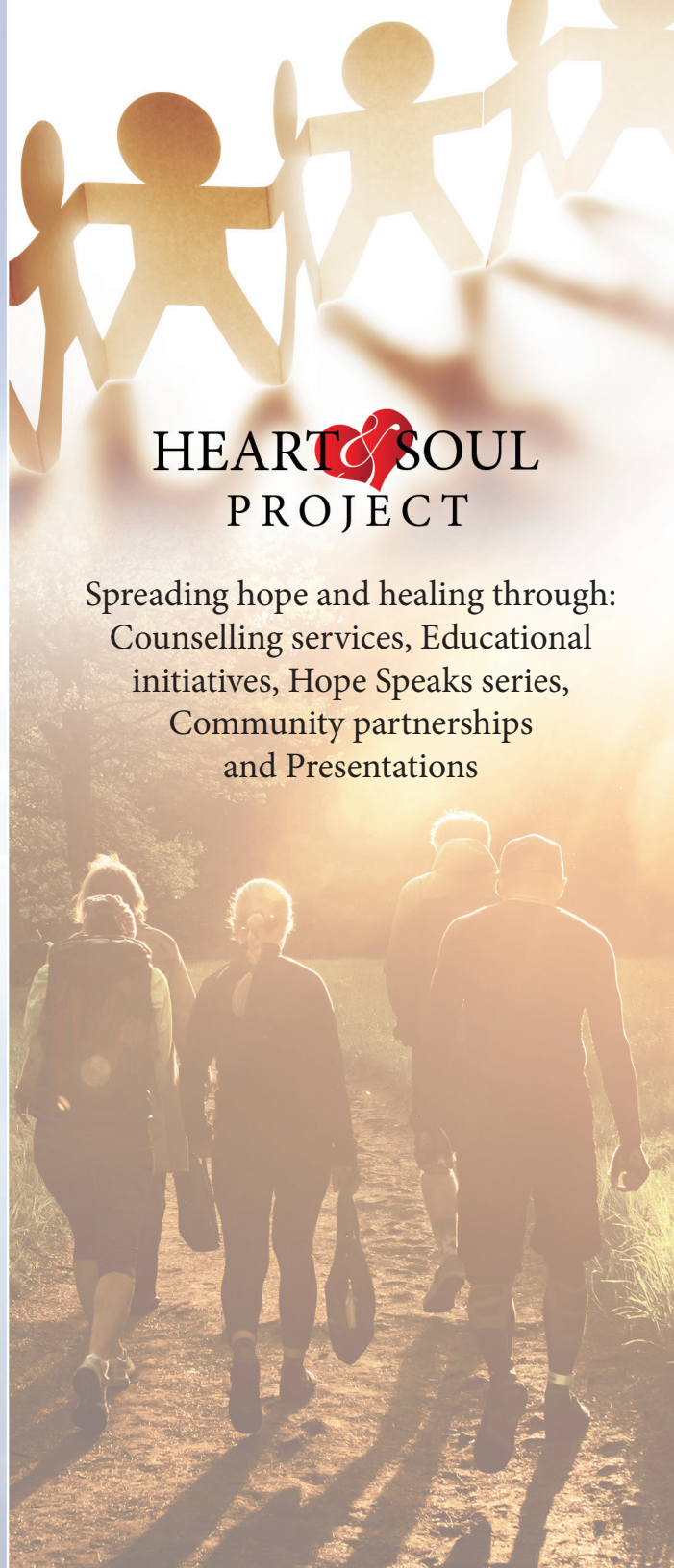


Dr. William G. (Bill) Hoy

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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WHEN YOU FEEL GRIEF'S EMOTIONS

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Bereavement is one of the most common yet least understood experiences of life. You are probably discovering that grief is really a collision of all the emotions and feelings imaginable. Sometimes, it seems that sorrow, joy, anger, guilt, fear, loneliness, and worry are all clamoring for your attention at once!

Perhaps life seems to have disintegrated and you may think that you are literally losing your mind! After the numbness and initial shock begin to wear off, life may seem like it is falling apart. Perhaps you feel like you are in a fog or performing like a robot. These are some of the reasons most experts advise grieving people to avoid making major life decisions like selling your home or changing jobs in the first year or so of bereavement.

You may feel anger now, an emotion experienced by most grieving people during their bereavement. Maybe your anger is directed at the doctors—"They should have done more." Perhaps it is directed at God—"If he really cared for me, this would not have happened." You may find your anger is even directed at your loved-one who died—"How could she/he just abandon me like this?" Though some people say that anger is wrong, it is a real part of the grief process, experienced by people from all ethnic backgrounds, cultures, and religious perspectives.

Guilt can also be particularly strong during grief. Guilt invades when we perceive that we have done something wrong or failed to do something right. You know the feeling: "If I had insisted she go to the doctor earlier. . ." or "If only I had been home, I could have called the paramedics."

When you feel yourself sinking into the hopeless quicksand of "what ifs" and "if onlys," you might find it helpful to write an imaginary "letter" of apology to the person who died, asking for his or her forgiveness. Recalling memories—the months and years you had together—may also help you put the guilt-producing events in the context of your entire relationship.

Fear often breaks through in bereavement, too. You may fear what is unknown about the future, the changes in relationships, or the new responsibilities you now carry. If you fear for your safety while in your home, check that the locks are in good, working order and perhaps have a knowledgeable friend or professional make a home security assessment. When you find yourself afraid you will get sick, a common fear for people who have cared for a terminally ill loved one, talk to your doctor about a thorough physical exam.

Loneliness is perhaps the most persistent of the emotions of grief, tending to catch us when we least expect it. But remember that hearing a favorite song or smelling the aroma of a familiar food will eventually become a way you recall pleasant memories of life with your loved one.

Along with what seems to be unending sadness, these emotions and several dozen others are often experienced as part of the grief process. But remember that every person experiences grief somewhat differently, and there are no timetables or chronological stages through which you must "progress." Remember that the grief you now feel is the normal, natural response to a major loss in your life.

Your loved one played many different roles in your life, perhaps including breadwinner, gardener, cook, mechanic, and housekeeper. He or she was perhaps your confidant, life's companion, and best friend. That means your grief is different from that of anyone else's, even if they did experience a "similar" loss. Do not be afraid to express your grief your way.

WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

You may be struggling with timetables, wondering how long this will take. The fact is the loss of a loved one is never something you "just get over." Your life was profoundly impacted by this person's life, and now your life has been profoundly changed by his or her death.

Participating in a support group with other bereaved people can be a very healing experience. You may



also want to consider seeking the counsel of a physician, member of the clergy, or therapist. The objectivity and "listening ear" such a person provides can help you immeasurably.

Often, the journey through grief presents opportunities you would never have otherwise seen. And that's the best part of traveling on this journey. Unexpected storms often produce the most fabulous rainbows. Unintended detours can introduce you to incredible vistas you would never otherwise have seen. Even being forced to slow down on this journey can give you time for looking inside yourself and reevaluating what you really treasure in life.

Life is different now, and it promises many more changes in the months and years ahead. There is life beyond loss! Positive change and personal growth can be yours, even when you must say good-bye and feel grief's emotions.

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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