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Helping Hands

Spring 2005

How grieving styles differ

By **Catherine Hoff**
HAND of the Peninsula

The decision to bring another child into our lives was not entered into lightly by either my husband or myself. After all, we had already been blessed with two beautiful children, a son and a daughter. But, we had both been the third born in our respective families and we each had a secret wish to duplicate the same scenario in our own family, as well. When our baby was diagnosed with a genetic syndrome incompatible with life at 18 weeks gestation, our hopes for his survival and the possibility of any future children were simultaneously dashed.

The loss of our son sent the two of us into a tailspin of emotion and confusion beyond description. Yet, even though we were both suffering, it was difficult to offer each other much in the way of comfort or solace. We traveled our separate roads of grief for a long, long time and just recently I have finally been able to make some sense of our vastly different journeys.

As part of a course assignment during the fall semester of 2004, I completed a research

project with the participation of several parents from HAND of the Peninsula. This study examined the differences in reactions displayed by mothers and fathers following the experience of a neonatal loss. My intent was to shed light on the very complex, often misunderstood, and potentially conflicting patterns of behavior displayed by men and women dur-

How can a man or woman tend to the personal process of bereavement while simultaneously considering the needs of his or her partner?

ing the grieving process. I felt compelled to explore the topic of gender differences in response to grief because of my personal experience in dealing with this tragedy. I

was also interested in finding out how other couples dealing with a similar loss have coped with similar events and how their experiences compared to mine.

When my husband and I lost our son, we were faced with the dual challenge of reconstructing our lives as individuals as well as reestablishing our relationship as a couple. How can a man or woman tend to the personal process of bereavement while simultaneously considering the needs of their partner? What insights might bring about greater understanding between grieving

Grieving *continued on page 5*

Donations

continued from page 4

Rebecca and John Fanous, in memory of Jasmine Christine Fanous

Myrna and Robert Filman

Twila and Paul Forbes, in memory of Cosmo Forbes

Cherie Golant and Ronald Gutierrez, in memory of Julia Golant Gutierrez

Yael Gott, in memory of Elain Miliman

Annette and Dan Gracia, Gina and Daniel Guidi, in memory of Natalie Guidi

Celia and Donald Hartnett, in honor of Jill Nelson and Christine Reeve

Elham and Farzad Heydari, in loving memory of our little angel, Neema Shams Heydari

Catherine and Gary Hoff, in memory of Neil Christopher Hoff

Michele and Mark Hollar, in memory of William Adam Hollar

Paula Jo Husack, MA, LMFT, CGP

Jack Jensen

Margaret and Daniel Seligson

Lisa and Richard Jones, in memory of David Carl Jones
Irene Kennedy

Rachel Kindt and Gregory Marcus, in memory of our twins

Barbara Kirsch, Ph.D., in honor of Celia Hartnett

Patricia Leeper and Craig Ball, in memory of Abigail Ball and William Ball

Irene and Maia Lustgarten, in loving memory of Talia Elise Nelson Twicken

Laurie McLucas and William Crook

Grace and Todd Moeller, in memory of Isabelle Grace Moeller on her 6th birthday

Yvonne and Ken Nava, in memory of Danielle Nava

Jill Nelson and Joseph Twicken, in loving memory of Talia Elise on her 6th birthday

Kathleen and Victor Parrette, in memory of Malorie Anne Parrette

Margaret Quinn and Danny Shen, in memory of Alison Quinn Mei-yi Shen

Sharon and John Rayner, in honor of Sherry Rayner

Jeannette and Arnold Ricard, in memory of Kevin Latrell Green

Melinda and Eric Ruchames, in memory and in honor of Zachary Clark Ruchames' 18th birthday

Marty Ryhanych and Anthony Mueller, in memory of our son Troy Mueller

Allegra and Daniel Scheirer, in memory of Julia Elizabeth and Grant Scheirer

Mary and William Schorr, in memory of Daniel Schorr

Phyllis and John Van Hagen, in memory of Spyder West-Ostwald

Jacqueline Willson, in memory of Mary Kate Holsinger

Rebecca and Andrew Logan

Brenda and Bob Binder

Jennifer and Michael Weise

Helping After Neonatal Death

Chapters:

HAND of the Peninsula
P.O. Box 3693
Redwood City, CA 94064
(650) 692-6655 crisis line
(650) 367-6993 office
<http://www.HANDsupport.org>

HAND of Santa Cruz Co.
P.O. Box 3693
Redwood City, CA 94064
(650) 367-6993 office
(831) 438-4513

HAND of Santa Clara, Contra Costa, Alameda Counties, Central Valley
1-888-908-HAND

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Helping Hands

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MAY 15, 2005

Volunteer opportunities abound

At the HAND of the Peninsula Board meeting in January, the Board updated the descriptions of member committees and signing up to volunteer for these important efforts on behalf of HAND parents.

Below are descriptions of those committees. The Board invites you to review these descriptions and if any of these committees are of interest to you as a volunteer, please feel free to contact the Committee leads as noted below. We will be updating you throughout the year with our progress and activities.

FINANCE/ FUND RAISING

Committee lead:

Jill Nelson

(info@HANDsupport.org)

This committee is responsible for helping HAND remain fiscally solvent while also helping to raise funds for ongoing activities and special events.

Committee members write and distribute bi-annual solicitation letters, plan and stage HAND's participation in the Human Race, develop potential grant submissions as applicable and manage the organization's finances.

SUPPORT

Committee lead:

Melisse Lusin

(info@HANDsupport.org)

This committee is responsible for helping to recruit and coordinate volunteer activities such as grief and subsequent pregnancy support meetings, phone support and newer programs such as Parents Again.

EDUCATION

Committee lead:

Catherine Hoff

(info@HANDsupport.org)

This committee is responsible for coordinating HAND's in-service programs with local hospitals and community groups as well as growing and maintaining HAND's lending library.

In addition, this committee leads the HAND membership training and community outreach.

COMMUNICATIONS/ EVENTS

Committee lead:

Joan Stone

(info@HANDsupport.org)

This committee is re-

sponsible for developing and distributing the quarterly HAND newsletter as well as developing content for the HAND website.

This committee looks for public relations opportunities in the community. Also, this committee handles the planning and execution of the annual Service of Remembrance event.

OPERATIONS

Committee lead:

Christine Reeve

(info@HANDsupport.org)

This committee is responsible for the back-office operations for HAND including donation acknowledgment, anniversary recognition, and administration such as the HAND voice mail system, mail distribution and office maintenance.

TECHNOLOGY

Committee lead:

Joe Twicken

(info@HANDsupport.org)

This committee is responsible for maintaining the HAND website, developing and implementing a new member database this year and creating mailing lists and labels.

Support Meetings

Support meetings are informal gatherings where parents can receive and give support by sharing common experiences as we work through and resolve our losses. We cordially invite you to attend.

Meetings may start out with a topic of discussion, but everyone is free to bring up any questions or aspects of their losses which may concern them.

Attending your first meeting does take courage, but parents who attend find a comforting network of support, encouragement, friendship and understanding.

Nothing is required of you. There are no dues or fees. You need not speak one word. Even if you no longer need the meetings for yourself, come and share your experiences with someone who has recently suffered a loss.

HAND of the Peninsula

Support meetings are held on the first and third Wednesdays of the month. Contact: Melisse Lusin (650) 367-6993

Time: 7:30-9:30 P.M.

Dates: March 2 and 16, 2005
April 6 and 20
May 4 and 18
June 1 and 15

Location: Sequoia Health and Wellness Services, 702 Marshall St., Redwood City.

HAND of Santa Cruz

Support meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month. Contact: Kristie Shul-

man (831) 438-4513.

Time: 7:30-9:30 P.M.

Dates: March 16, 2005
April 20
May 18
June 15

Location: Congregational Church of Soquel

Pregnancy Support Meeting

Parents who are pregnant again after a loss have special emotional and psychological needs. Pregnancy Support Group meetings address the concerns of bereaved parents who have started or are thinking about starting another pregnancy. Fathers are especially encouraged to attend.

HAND of the Peninsula holds subsequent pregnancy support meetings on the second Wednesdays of the month as needed. Please call the HAND office (650) 367-6993 if you plan to attend or need more information.

Time: 7:30-9:30 P.M.

Dates: March 9, 2005
April 13
May 11
June 8

HAND of Santa Cruz

HAND of Santa Cruz' subsequent pregnancy meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month. Please call (831) 438-4513 for more information.

Births

Deserae Monique Cardenas—Sept. 6, 2004, to Patricia Rubio and Tony Cardenas Jr. and older siblings Monet, Anthony and Alexis.

Nicholas Patrick Guidi — Dec. 27, 2004, to Gina and Daniel Guidi and big brother Jack.

Natania Shaye Bevington — Jan. 17, 2005, to Laura and Ken Bevington and big brother Ry.

Donations

Our warmest thanks to those who have sent donations to HAND of the Peninsula. It is through your support that HAND is able to grow and help others.

Anu and Peter Minocha, in memory of Kavin Minocha and for support of parents who have lost children

Suzanne Gallie and Mark Mitchell, in memory of Kyra Moree Mitchell

Michael Berman, in honor of Christina Conklin

Stephen Buchner, M.D.

Wendy Hopfenberg and Michael Occhiolini

Kristina Scott and David Pollock, in memory of Danielle

Jane and Mitchell Zimmerman, in honor of all the good work done by HAND

Kathleen and Thomas Addison, in memory of P.J. Hawkins, Jr.

Stephanie and Gary Allen, in memory of Alex Allen

Peter and Judith Mason Benson

Patricia Bruno, in memory of Baby Escobar

Christabel and Alexander Choi, in memory of "Teach us love Hudson Choi."

Ellen and Warren Dodge, in memory of Matthew Dodge

Donations *continued on page 2*

Grieving

continued from page 1

parents as they seek ways to make sense of their loss?

As I began examining the professional literature on this subject, it became obvious that the research supports the notion that males and females react quite differently to situations surrounding the death of a baby. Mothers and fathers exhibit distinct ways of experiencing their loss, interpreting their loss, and expressing their loss.

This "incongruent grieving" between men and women, although normal, can create barriers to communication and feelings of vulnerability for the individual, possibly resulting in relational conflict.

With this in mind, I approached several members at HAND of the Peninsula in order to elicit involvement in my project. A total of 32 parents, 13 fathers and 19 mothers, agreed to participate by way of completing the Perinatal Grief Scale (Lasker and Toedter, 1990) a questionnaire designed to measure symptoms consistent with grief and bereavement associated with a neonatal loss. Upon analysis of the data collected, the findings supported my research hypothesis that women indeed display a greater number of symptoms related to grief than men. There was also confirmation that this greater level of intensity in the grieving patterns of mothers, as compared to fathers, continues, even several years after the loss.

In reviewing the methods of communication and coping often employed by mothers

experiencing grief, behaviors include active grieving such as crying, or other displays of depression, talking things out with others, and the practicing of rituals associated with spirituality or the collection of memorabilia. Common reactions of fathers include displays of anger and frustration, withdrawal, or keeping busy via work and other outside commitments. Noting these vastly different approaches to pregnancy loss, it is easy to see why an individual might feel as though a

I am moving closer to the idea of reframing the loss of our child as an inspiration to further emotional intimacy and exploring new avenues to communication.

brick wall is building up between their self and their partner as both try to come to terms with the situation in their own way.

Here are a few things to consider that might help dismantle this brick wall, enhance communication, while hopefully giving meaningful assistance to each other during this time of sorrow. Men might try to accept a woman's need for outside support, listen without judgment or criticism, and recognize that her process is often longer and more intense than a man's. Women might practice validating a man's emotions, allowing him to experience periods of silence or withdrawal, and finding ways to lessen his role as "protector" by seeking other means of support. What I have noticed about many of the couples that come to HAND is that often men will accompany their partners to a

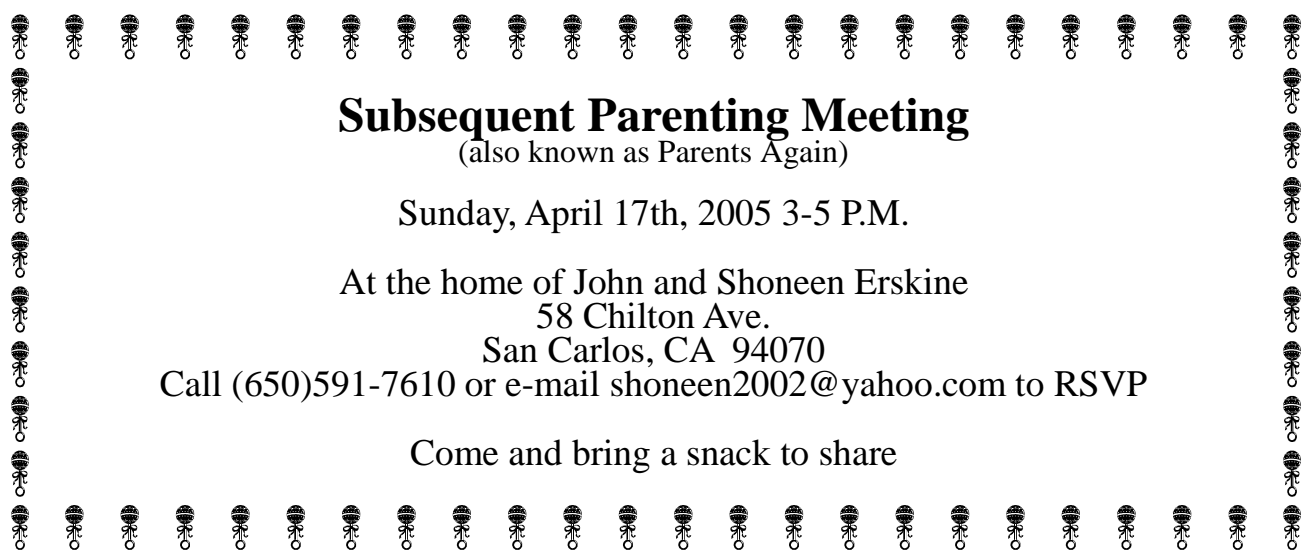
grief support meeting, even though it may not be their activity of choice. What a wonderful way for these men to support their partners by recognizing that she needs him by her side at this time! Conversely, I also often see women who attend meetings on their own, without their partners. What a wonderful way for these women to support their partners by recognizing that he needs time to be by himself while she can feel free to pursue whatever type of outside support she may need!

I learned a great deal about myself, and my husband, during the course of this research project. I have always thought of the loss of

our son as a truly defining event in our marriage, significantly affecting my feelings about the relationship that I have with my spouse. By learning to appreciate how each of us has integrated this experience into our lives, I am moving closer to the idea of reframing the loss of our child as an inspiration to further emotional intimacy and exploring new avenues to communication.

I also plan to incorporate this research into my graduate thesis work in the field of Art Therapy Psychology. My hope is to design an expressive art exercise in order to facilitate parental grief and thereby allow couples to gain a sense of completion over their interrupted parenting experience.

Catherine and Gary Hoff's son Neil Christopher was born on Aug. 1, 1987



Subsequent Parenting Meeting

(also known as Parents Again)

Sunday, April 17th, 2005 3-5 P.M.

At the home of John and Shoneen Erskine
58 Chilton Ave.
San Carlos, CA 94070

Call (650)591-7610 or e-mail shoneen2002@yahoo.com to RSVP

Come and bring a snack to share