



WHEN ONE OF OUR MEMBERS DIES

by Michael Burdo

WHEN I was a Venturer advisor some years back, one of our sixteen year old company members who was on the Executive was coping with a diagnosis of cancer. He had his right leg amputated as a result and his prognosis was not good. Our company was very active, participating in regular, frequent camping excursions and many other outdoor activities. We insured that the youth continued to be an active participant in all of our meetings and events according to his capabilities. The choice to take part was never withheld and Paul was there for each and every event. He was an integral part of our Scouting family. When he died some six months later, our company was an instrumental part of the funeral service and burial. One youth read from scripture and at the request of Paul's family, the company served as the pall bearers both at the service and cemetery. Had the family not made the request, we would have approached them with an offer of service in some capacity that they would have found welcome. Scouting had always been an integral part of Paul's life and he had thoroughly enjoyed every moment of it.



Coming together and sharing your feelings and prayers with other members of the Scouting community can help you through difficult times.

Death is a part of the life cycle. When it comes to a member of our Scouting family, youth have many ways of reacting to it. As leaders, we can be instrumental in helping our youth cope with the experience. Young children will not clearly understand all that is taking place while

older youth will want to help out and be a part of the process. They will have questions and at times discomfort or awkwardness with what is taking place. As caring volunteers, our role should be one of stability and security. Make yourselves accessible to help the youth cope with the reality of dying. Ensure that you make eye contact and physical contact with the youth. Answer all their questions and address their concerns as openly and honestly as possible.

Younger children will experience a degree of anxiety at times while teens will want to take responsibility for helping out and being there for their friend who has died. Continue to maintain a sense of routine and keep an open dialogue as the youth cope with the experience. Often, encouraging the youth to keep a journal of the process and record the memorable times that they had with their lost one helps dramatically. I have even encouraged children to write a goodbye letter to their lost one and either hold onto it or leave it with the family. Younger children can make a colouring book of drawings with the help of their parents/leaders that depict highlights of the person's Scouting

Photo: Bill Kowalczyk

Adolescents Need to Know it is Acceptable to:

- Cry and feel "down". If their feelings get too overwhelming, they should find a caring adult or friend to talk these feelings over with.
- "Live in the past" for a while. It can help keep the memory alive, but don't let life pass them by.
- It's ok to have fun and enjoy life; to laugh again.
- Forgive themselves for the fights, arguments or nasty things they said to their dead parent, sibling or friend.

Adolescents Need to Know it is NOT Acceptable to:

- Use drugs or alcohol to drug their senses and/or pain. This approach will only hinder, not heal the hurt.
- Do things out of anger to hurt other people because they are hurt themselves.
- Hide their feelings and not talk about what is bothering them in order to protect their parents.
- Act as a scapegoat or "bad guy" just to appear tough in their peer group's eyes.

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experience. You can be there for them through constant nurturing and allowing for the expressions of feelings on their part. Most assuredly, you can express your own feelings to them as well.

There often arises a concern as to whether children should be allowed to go to the funeral service or memorial. With their parents' permission, they should be allowed to do so if they express this desire. Share information and answers to their questions according to their ability to comprehend in relation to their ages. Gentle touch, genuine empathy, and openness to allow youth to deal with the grieving process in their own way, with your stable and empathetic support, will go a long way. X

– Michael Burdo, B.A. B.S.W. is a Youth & Family Counsellor, and Scout Counsellor for the 24th. Elmdale Ottawa Scout Troop.

SOME PRAYERS AND SAYINGS FOR LOSS AND BEREAVEMENT

Lord, the death of our friend (name) brings an emptiness into our lives. We are separated from them and feel broken and bewildered. Give us confidence that they are safe and their life is complete with you, and bring us together at the last to the wholeness and fullness of your presence in heaven. Amen. (Adapted from *Common Worship: Pastoral Services*)

O Lord, may the end of my life be the best of it; may my closing acts be my best acts, and may the best of my days be the day when I shall meet you. (A closing Muslim prayer from *The Oxford Book of Prayer*)

Yearn neither for the past, nor anticipate the future. The past is gone, the future yet to come. One who sees clearly the present moment, certain and unwavering, should strive to maintain that awareness. Practice diligently today, who knows whether tomorrow, will bring death? No one can bargain with the Lord of Death. (www.buddhanet.net/cmdsg/karma7.htm)

Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing. And when you have reached the mountain top, then you shall begin to climb. And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then you shall truly dance. (Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*)

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I Don't Know What to Say: Unhelpful Comments and Helpful Alternatives

Do Not Say:

I know just how you feel.....	I am so sorry.
It is God's will.....	I know this is very painful for you.
You can always have more children..... (or at least you still have more children).	He/she was very special.
He/She had a very full life.....	I know you will miss him/her.
It's time to move on with your life.....	Take all the time you need.
Be strong.....	(Hug)/ or This must be very hard.
Something good always comes out of tragedy..... (or every cloud has a silver lining).	(Silence) Listen.
They are better off.....	We will all miss him/her.
Call me if you need me.....	I will call you tomorrow. In the meantime, if you need me, here is my phone number.
You must be strong for your children.....	How are you managing with the children? Do you need some "downtime"? Can I help?

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