

HOW HOPE CHANGES

DR. BOB BAUGHER

You may have heard the amazing Dr. Darcie Sims speak at a conference or perhaps read one of her books. Darcie died in 2014. Fortunately, her words of wisdom live on.

One of Darcie's books is titled *If I Could Just See Hope*. In it she speaks of hope in an eloquent way:

We are always in search of hope, in search of that magical moment when we remember first that our loved one lived. Hope isn't a place or a thing. Hope is not the absence of pain or fear or sadness. Hope is the possibility of renewed joy.

Let's look at how hope changes following the death of a loved one.

INITIAL HOPE

If your loved one died of an illness, the diagnosis of the terminal condition likely led you to hope that the doctor was mistaken. If the death was unexpected, you found yourself hoping it wasn't true. You hoped that who informed you somehow got it wrong. But, ultimately the hope that this person would still be in your life was crushed.

SHOCK-INDUCED HOPE

Your brain simply can't believe you would never see this person again. In an attempt to cope with

this horrendous fact, your brain responded by hoping that somehow your loved one would still come into your life—still walk through that door. If the death took place in infancy, you may have thought you heard crying in another room. If the death took place during elementary or teen years, you may have caught yourself imagining, "he's at a friend's house," or "she's at the mall."

If the death took place in adult years your brain may have found itself hoping, "He's away at school," or "She's at work."

HOPE THAT THE PAIN WILL END

As days turn to weeks and months, some people, in the depth of their grief, may begin to hope to an end of their pain by ending their life. This new form of hope goes something like this: "If I die, the pain will stop and I will be with my loved one."

If you've had these thoughts, you are not alone. They are absolutely normal. It is what a desperate brain does when left with no hope. If you are still having these thoughts, I ask you to tell a trusted friend, a relative, or a counselor. As you well know, taking your life or letting yourself die at this time will add to the grief that your family members are experiencing. Tell someone who can just sit there and be a good listener and who will not judge you.

HOPE THAT THE PAIN WILL SUBSIDE

As daily life continues without your loved one, you might experience your hope again changing. Your feelings of wishing to die may turn to a hope that the deep feelings of grief will subside.

There are a variety of methods for working on the intensity of your grief: sharing it with a support group, discovering a book, an article or a video that speaks to your grief, sitting with a good listener, writing down your feelings in a journal, or for some people, just the passage of time.

A few years ago, I finished a video project in which we followed up six men whose family members had died 20 years prior. In the video *Men and Their Grief—20 Year Later* I asked bereaved dad, Don, “How have you dealt with the guilt of your son [who died in a playground accident]?” and his answer came immediately, “Time. Time.”

After years and years of blaming himself for letting his son go to the playground, his brain gradually let it subside. Does it still come up at times? Yes. Has he found hope? Definitely.

Will he ever forget his precious son? Of course not.

HOPE THAT I WILL NOT FORGET

As the rollercoaster of grief slowly becomes less volatile, a new hope may begin to emerge: the hope that memories of our loved one won't fade. To help with this, many people find creative ways to keep their loved one's memory alive: with picture albums or videos, creating a memorial scholarship, planting a tree, telling or writing stories of the person's life, wearing or carrying precious objects, recognizing the birthday, the day of the death, and anniversaries, visiting the grave site and talking to the loved one—saying “Hello” and “Good night” and “I'm thinking of you.”

HOPE THAT I CAN LIVE MY LIFE

With time, a new hope slowly comes into view:

the hope that, despite the tragedy that has forever changed you and your life, you can learn to live again, laugh again and love again.

If you are early in your grief, this form of hope may seem impossible. You may find that hoping to live and laugh again is an insult to the memory of your loved one. But, consider this: if your loved one were to appear at this instant and say something to you about hoping to live, laugh and love again, would this person say, “This is not something you should hope for?”

Even though this precious person is not physically in your life, their hope for you would be to live your life. Yes, despite your pain, your grief, your missing them so much at times you can hardly breathe, your daily job is to live. To live your life so that, if you were to ever meet this person in another existence, he or she would say to you, “Good for you. You turned your despair into hope. I hoped you would.”

This is the hope that Darcie talked about when she said: Hope is the possibility of renewed joy . . . it's the memory of love given and received. Hope is here, within the magic and the memories of your heart. **Hope is us . . . you and me, and the person next to you, and across the room and down the street and in your dreams. We are each other's hope.**