

FIRSTLIGHT NEWSLETTER

VIRTUAL MILE IN-MEMORY WALK SPECIAL EDITION



*"On this breeze, I send you love.
Love which is not dimmed by
time or diminished by death."*

MESSAGE FROM FIRSTLIGHT CEO

BY FIONNUALA SHEEHAN, CEO FIRSTLIGHT

Dear families, friends and supporters of FirstLight, I am writing this message as we bring to a close our annual Mile on Memory Walks event held on Father's Day, 21 June. It was a remembrance event with a difference, held in a virtual way in 13 different locations, including one in Northern Ireland and another in Australia! From the many messages, videos and photos received, it is clear that a great number of people welcomed the opportunity to remember their loved ones in the virtual company of their family members, friends and neighbours, and found the experience uplifting and beneficial. We are sharing some of the photos received in the following pages.

Included in this Issue are articles by Litsa Williams and Eleanor Haley, mental health professionals with more than 20 years' experience in grief and bereavement, whose mission is to promote grief education, exploration and expression in both practical and creative ways. We are also including links to a recent talk by Bríd Carroll on Grieving in Exceptional Times, organised by The Irish Hospice Foundation and the Irish Childhood Bereavement Network. As many of the Covid-19 restrictions are being lifted from 29 June, we are planning for the return of our Home Visits service which is valued by newly bereaved families; availability of the option of face-to face counselling and therapy in addition to tele/video counselling, and availability of Play Therapy for siblings of suddenly bereaved children.

Finally, we have included some guidelines on the recently announced VHI Virtual Women's Mini Marathon which will take place between October 1st and October 10th 2020. Participants are asked to complete the 10km event "their way" over the course of 10 days, with the overall goal of raising €10 million for charities. If you plan to participate, please choose FirstLight as your charity.

Thank you to all who have supported the work of FirstLight through these extraordinary times. It has helped us to continue to provide our services and to support families that have lost their child suddenly during Covid-19, as well as other families that have lost their loved ones prior to the Lockdown.

With best wishes for your good health. Keep safe,

Yours sincerely,

Fionnuala Sheehan, CEO, FirstLight

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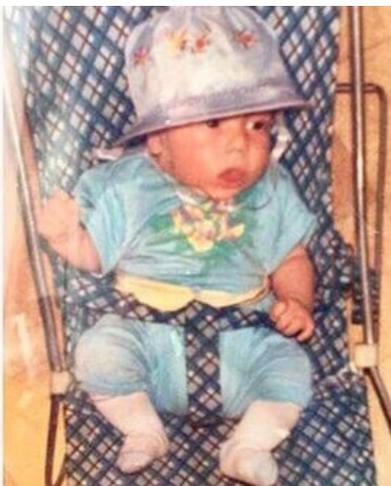


VIRTUAL MILE IN-MEMORY WALK 2020 FROM DUBLIN TO AUSTRALIA





VIRTUAL MILE IN-MEMORY WALK 2020 FROM DUBLIN TO AUSTRALIA





3 WAYS TO GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR GRIEF

BY LITSA WILLIAMS AND ELEANOR HALEY OF WHAT'S YOUR GRIEF.COM

Trying to experience more grief may feel counter intuitive to many of you. Some of you may be thinking, “Wait, I’d love to feel less of whatever all this is! Why would anyone deliberately seek out grief?” And that makes total sense – but there are some compelling reasons for healthily connecting with your grief when you feel disconnected. Here are three reasons from the *What’s Your Grief* team.

1: Address avoidance:

A common cause of absent grief is chronic avoidance. When someone uses avoidance in grief, usually, it’s because they don’t want to experience painful thoughts and emotions related to the loved one’s death or their ongoing grief. They avoid experiencing these things by:

1. **Isolating:** Staying away from people and places that might bring up their grief. And people who might make them feel bad for grieving or push them to feel better before they’re ready.
2. **Eliminating reminders:** Avoiding anything that might bring up memories. For example, never opening the door to their loved one’s room or putting all their loved one’s photos away.
3. **Using substances** to numb and forget
4. **Saying “I’m fine”** and throwing all their time and attention into other people, work, etc

It’s important to note, sometimes a little avoidance is helpful. Someone might need a little time before feeling strong enough to face certain reminders. Or a person might need to find ways to avoid their grief so they can focus on other things like work and school. It’s okay to avoid grief at times as long as you also make space and time for coping with it as well.

If you recognize that you’re not making space and time for certain aspects of your grief, or if you see that you’ve been avoiding, it may be time to think about facing some of what you’ve been running away from.

2. Find (your kind of) coping outlets for grief expression and exploration:

Reducing avoidance means doing things like going to a specific place where you’re reminded of your loved one, facing a painful memory, getting sober, or finding new ways to cope with difficult emotions. These can be very challenging tasks that can be made easier with the right coping skills and support. It’s always best to find the coping that works best for you based on your preferences, strengths, and resources.

Some people may want to talk about their experiences with others. For example, they may want to speak with a professional counselor. Therapy is a great resource and, regardless of what’s going on in your life, a little counseling never hurt anyone.

Other people will want to find less formal ways to talk about their grief, maybe in a support group or with a close friend. Another option for people who want support but can’t access it “in real life” is to head online and connect with others through reading grief articles and connecting through online groups.

Then there are people who want to find ways to explore and express their grief on their own. Not everyone’s a talker, not everyone’s a sharer, and many people have skills and talents they can utilize to cope with grief through more creative expression. For example, many people get in touch with their grief through things like writing, photography, painting, and music.

3. Learn about grief:

Learning more about grief can be helpful in a few ways. First, some people are more cognitive in their grief coping than emotional. They’re more hands-on and analytical when it comes to dealing with painful experiences. These types of grievers may find their comfort in understanding different grief concepts and thinking about how their grief fits within it all. Though this may not look like “typical grief” and many people mistake it for not grieving – it most certainly is a normal and okay way to connect with your grief.

Another good reason to learn about grief is to get an accurate picture of the grief and its grand scope. Sometimes people believe they aren’t grieving enough because they don’t know about the wide range of what is “normal” in grief. Perhaps you are grieving, but it just looks different than you expected. I can’t tell you how many people email us after reading one of our articles to tell us about their “a-ha!” moment when they finally realized that YES they are normal!

WHAT THE NEWLY BEREAVED SHOULD KNOW

BY LITSA WILLIAMS AND ELEANOR HALEY OF WHAT'S YOUR GRIEF.COM

Quite often, the best thing you can give to someone new to grief is a hug or a shoulder and your quiet but abiding presence. At a time when closeness is the answer, it's become an impossibility. If you're newly bereaved, I'm sorry you're going through a loss in semi-isolation, and I'm sorry all anyone can offer you is grief support from a distance.

Hello to the newly bereaved. I'm sorry to meet you here in the place where loved ones leave you — a place where no one wants to be. If this is your first time here, you may find it darker, foggier, and more frightening than you expected. If you've been here before, you'll probably notice that things look different than you remember. That's the nature of this place. It's always changing, depending on who you're saying goodbye to.

You may feel incredibly alone right now, so the first thing I want you to know is that there are people who want to help you find your way out of this place. Most people can only join you for parts of your journey, and those who you do and do not see along the way will probably surprise you. But they are out there. There may be times when you feel let down by your support system, but try and remember, they aren't trained for this. Most likely, your friends and family have the same good intentions, but varying levels of tact and execution.

Though providing honest feedback sometimes feels awkward, you'll get more of what you need if you can tell people what is and is not helpful. Also, try and lean on your loved one's strengths and forgive their weaknesses at least once. And when all else fails, look for the grief safe havens in your community – the counselors, support groups, and grief centers. The next thing you should know is, there's no trail of bread crumbs to lead you back to your old life. After someone you love dies, life changes. Joan Didion put it well when she said, "Life changes fast. Life changes in the instant. You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends."

That's not to say everything familiar is lost. Some things about your old life are already gone, and some will necessarily change, but some parts will stay the same – you don't need to know which is which right now. Uncertainty is scary, but it's normal for things to be hazy. There are a lot of things you can't know right now, but they will become more evident over time.

Also, there's a lot that probably hasn't sunk in just yet. Many people say the days following their loved one's death were a blur. You won't always feel this way. Actually, for many of you, what you're experiencing is probably more akin to a temporary acute stress response than grief. It's okay to be in shock. It's okay to feel numb. It's okay to feel all the things you're feeling. Grief is a lot of overwhelming things, but it isn't dangerous. Grief, in and of itself, won't harm you – though it does mean experiencing some pretty painful things.

As you become more familiar with grief, try and throw away any preconceived notions you have about it following a set of stages or a timeline with a beginning, middle, and an end. It's so tempting to believe in something that makes grief seem manageable. But how could anything unique to you and your relationship with your loved one possibly be so uniform?

I'm sorry to say; grief can be unruly and unpredictable. Sometimes you hear the rumble of thunder before the grief storms hit, and sometimes they bubble up out of nowhere, but they do always subside. And it's through weathering these storms time and again that they incrementally become more bearable. Until eventually, you learn it's safe to go outside even though there's always the chance grief could cloud your day.

Yes, "always". Your grief will forever be a part of you because your loved one is forever a part of you – and this is the last thing I want to tell you (for now). Your loved one is never really gone from this world. No, they aren't physically "here" to look at, talk to, or hold, and that hurts like hell. But in mind, heart, and spirit – as a part of the past, present, and future – they are here. They are here as long as you are here to remember them. Hold onto this truth as you stand in this place where your loved one has left you and fight for it if you have to. It's the guiding light that will help you out of this place, and chances are it will be part of the foundation on which you build whatever comes next.



The co-authors of this [What's Your Grief?](#) Litsa Williams and Eleanor Haley, are Baltimore-based mental health professionals with 20+ years of experience in grief and bereavement. Their mission is to promote grief education, exploration, and expression in both practical and creative ways. The website aims to provide the public with...Education that reaches beyond generalization, Practical and specific suggestions for moving forward, Modes of self-exploration and self-expression that suit all types of thinkers and doers, Ways to honour and remember deceased loved ones and A supportive community.



VHI VIRTUAL WOMEN'S MINI MARATHON 2020

The VHI Virtual Women's Mini Marathon is more than a 10k event, it's a fun day out for everyone! Over the past 37 years, the VHI Team has worked hard to make sure that it brings the very best event that we can participate in. This year, Covid 19 put the brakes on the Team's plans. On 13th March 2020 the Team announced that it would be postponing the event and by 28 May it became clear that a physical event would no longer be possible; the Team then focused on planning its very first VHI Virtual Women's Mini Marathon. The plan is to offer a real alternative to the usual Marathon day out in Dublin with a Virtual 10k event. While it's not possible for everyone to be together, it is possible to do the 10k collectively, but safely apart...by running, jogging or walking the pavements in our own parts of the country.

So what happens on Race Day?

In the lead up to, and on Race day itself, the organisers want us to get involved every step of the way and to hear our stories – share them on social media platforms. Tag us at #TeamFirstLight or #VhiWMM and @FirstLight_IrITwitter and Facebook, or send FirstLight your videos and snaps directly to info@firstlight.ie

Choosing Your Route

It's best to take part in a venue close to your home: begin at your own front door; if that is not possible, check out a local park or green space which is both safe and accessible. Take note if there are any special times slotted out for vulnerable and older members of our community and pick your time accordingly. Alternatively - Loop in your garden– if you have the space. A tracker of some sort can help measure the distance and how many loops make 10k! Take care, wear appropriate footwear, and consider changing direction occasionally. Walk around your block– Venture further and walk in blocks, finding a suitable path to take. Let your neighbours know and you might even drum up some socially distant supporters. Take the stairs?– Anyone fancy climbing their 10k? Maybe your route is around your kitchen table. Let us know how you'll be doing your 10k, your way.

Print your Race Number

The organisers want to recreate the experience of race day as much as possible. They will be providing downloadable Race Numbers which you can personalise and we'd love to see lots of pictures of the FirstLight participants wearing their "bibs". You can customise them with your name, FirstLight, or a special message to say why you are taking part.

GRIEVING IN EXCEPTIONAL TIMES

By Andrew Mernagh

The Irish Hospice Foundation and Irish Childhood Bereavement Network (ICBN) hosted a free online Bereavement information Evening titled Grieving in Exceptional Times on June 16th. This online event was for people bereaved through any circumstance. The talk was given by Bríd Carroll, Chairperson of the ICBN, a qualified psychotherapist and Counselling Supervisor with a special interest in bereavement and loss. On the evening Bríd discussed the process of grief, the ways we can support each other and the potential impact the current pandemic has on death, dying and bereavement.

You can listen back to Bríd's Talk on FirstLight (www.firstlight.ie) or on the Irish Hospice Foundation (www.hospicefoundation.ie) websites. A second online event will be hosted on Tuesday, 3 June, 13h00, titled Grief in the Workplace, supporting colleagues and staff. To register for this event, visit www.hospicefoundation.ie.