

# TO YOUR HEALTH

Carleton-Willard Village Out-Patient Clinic • 100 Old Billerica Rd., Bedford, MA 01730

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## BEFORE YOU CAN KNOW KINDNESS

By Barbara Chenoweth, NP

Many people were stunned and horrified by the tragedy in Connecticut last month. Many still struggle to find a way to reconcile within themselves the deep, senseless loss of children and adults. What does their loss say about our culture? Is the violence a reflection on us all? What can an individual do?

Certainly the initial reaction, one of acute shock and disbelief leaves us reeling. As the reality sets in, we can be left with many feelings. It is not uncommon to feel unsafe, mistrustful and "on edge." When tragedy occurs so unexpectedly, as it did when 9/11 happened, it takes time to emotionally absorb what has just taken place. Perhaps the greatest risk in such an aftermath is simply to suppress the painful feelings, put them aside and go on as if nothing really happened. Just forget it. This, too, is a coping strategy.

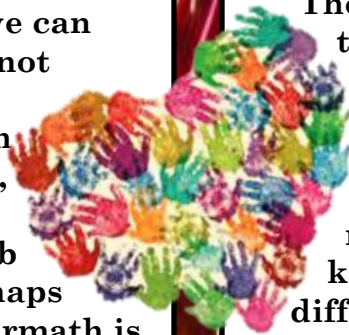
Just like when we experience a personal loss of a friend or a family member, suppressing the painful feelings may work for a while as a coping strategy, but eventually they come to the surface. Repressed grief often gets expressed in depression and physical symptoms. Sometimes grief comes out as anger towards another person or event that is totally unrelated to the original loss and seemingly out of proportion to a minor event. Sometimes painful emotions

from several losses simply build up and accumulate.

How can we prevent this from happening? How can we stop ourselves from tuning out the deep tragedies, the everyday losses that hit us from the TV and newspapers? What about our personal losses? A friend who dies suddenly and unexpectedly? What can we do with the pain and sorrow of these losses?

The author, Jack Kornfield, writes that the human heart has the extraordinary capacity to hold and transform the sorrows of life into a great stream of compassion; compassion is the movement of concern and kindness in response to the difficulty of any living being. It arises when you allow your heart to be touched by the pain and need of another, (*Buddha's Little Instruction Book*, NY: Bantam Books, 1994).

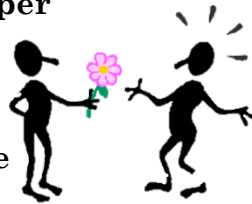
Others have talked about the ways in which prayer or contemplation help to transform sadness to compassion rather than to bitterness or despair. Brother David Steindl-Rast, in *Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer*, describes prayers as the poetry of prayerful living. Jon Kabat-Zinn speaks of the meditative view: "only through acceptance of the actuality of the present, no matter how painful or frightening or undesirable it may be, change and growth and healing can



come about. They only need to be nurtured in order to unfold," (*Letting Everything Become Your Teacher*, 2009).

Other words have been used to express this idea that through sorrow, one can grow and experience a deeper compassion:

**KINDNESS**  
by Naomi Shihab Nye



Before you know what kindness really is  
you must lose things.  
Feel the future dissolve in a moment  
like salt in a weakened broth.  
What you held in your hand,  
what you counted and carefully saved,  
all this must go so you know  
how desolate the landscape can be  
between the regions of kindness.  
How you ride and ride  
thinking the bus will never stop,  
the passengers eating maize and chicken  
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of  
kindness,  
you must travel where the Indian in the  
white poncho  
lies dead by the side of the road.  
You must see how this could be you, how  
he too was someone  
who journeyed through the night with  
plans and the simple breath that kept him  
alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest  
thing inside,  
you must know sorrow as the other

deepest thing.

You must wake up with sorrow.  
You must speak to it till your voice  
catches the thread of all sorrows  
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes  
sense anymore,  
only kindness that ties your shoes  
and sends you out into the day to mail  
letters and purchase bread,  
only kindness that raised its head  
from the crowd of the world to say  
It is I you have been looking for,  
and then goes with you everywhere  
like a shadow or a friend.

## HEALTH EDUCATION TALK

On Wednesday, January 9, Dr. Cherie Noe will give a health education talk, "Preventative Care: Concepts and Controversies." Join the discussion at 10:30 AM in Center Auditorium.

## BEDFORD DRUG PICK-UP

The Bedford Police will be picking up expired and unused medicine at the Clinic.

Please drop off old medicines at the Clinic between 8:30 AM – 12:30 PM on Friday, February 8, 2013.

*Unfortunately, we can only accept the medicines during those times and on the pick-up day*

## INSURANCE CARDS

If you have changed, or plan to change your health insurance, be sure to come to the Clinic with your new cards so that we can make a copy and change your Vial of Life.

**HAVE A SAFE AND  
WONDERFUL  
NEW YEAR**