

Adviser

PARENTING

CHERYL CRITCHLEY DEALS WITH THE LOSS OF A DEAR FRIEND

critchleyc@heraldsun.com.au



It's OK to cry

Breaking down is normal when you lose your life partner, so don't be afraid to ask for help

DEATH is always bad, but when it involves a parent it can devastate a community. I recently lost a close friend to breast cancer and her death shocked not only her family, to which she was devoted and who loved her, but everyone she knew.

Megan, 43, was beautiful inside and out; she would do anything for anyone. In the 30 years I knew her I never heard anyone say a bad word about her.

To her dying day she was thinking about others and what would happen to her boys, Luke, 12, and Ben, 6.

As a stay-at-home mum she doted on them and husband Brendan. As her illness progressed, Megan battled valiantly through pain and frustration to keep life normal for them as long as possible.

Her biggest fear was not being around for Luke and Ben. Before she died, everyone reassured her we would all be there for them. But is that enough?

After the emotional turmoil of a parent's death and funeral, what happens next?

Friends and family can move forward by keeping busy, but the partner and children must live with, and are reminded of, their loss every day.

Good Grief Australia program co-ordinator Caroline Dale says the most important thing is to keep the lost parent's memory alive for their partner and children.

Dale says it is important for the partner to be able to grieve and know support is there if they need it.

The surviving parent should be honest and open with the children and discuss the loss at a level appropriate for their age.

Dale says it is important to be honest and not confuse them with euphemisms such as "gone to sleep" or "passed away". "They need to understand that death is permanent," she says.

Good Grief offers courses and literature to help grieving families.

Dale says the surviving parent needs to know that breaking down is normal.

"If you feel like crying, cry in front of the children so they see that it's OK," she says.

Within weeks of Megan's death Luke honoured her memory by shaving his head with Wonga Park Primary School friends to raise money for the National Breast Cancer Foundation.

Dale says this is a great way to recognise his mother and to move on.

"To have a goal like that and to have something you're working towards can be as therapeutic as words," she says.

Australian Childhood Organisation CEO Joe Tucci says grieving takes time and we should make sure children can talk about the lost parent.

"It will feel painful, but it is a natural part of learning to renegotiate life after the loss of mum," he says.

Tucci says dads need to keep a routine while allowing children to remember, talk, cry and laugh about their mum.

"These reminders will feel terrible," he says. "But the focus for Dad should be on staying connected with the children, understanding how they are experiencing the loss of their mum and how they make sense of it all."

Family psychologist Andrew Fuller adds that the surviving parent needs someone, not necessarily a professional, to talk to about their partner.

He says trying to distract them is not always helpful because they need to grieve and talk about their feelings.

"You need friends who are prepared to be there for the whole box and dice," Fuller says.

*** To donate to Luke's fundraiser visit www.nbcf.org.au and from the "donate" menu choose "Give in Memory", click on "find a memorial" then search for "Megan Tindley" as a page or event name.**

FOR HELP WITH GRIEF

Good Grief: www.goodgrief.org.au
National Breast Cancer Foundation: www.nbcf.org.au

GriefLink: www.grieflink.asn.au
Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement: www.grief.org.au

National Association for Loss and Grief: www.nalagvic.org.au

PACFA (Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia): www.pacfa.org.au

WHEN A PARENT DIES

FOR THE SURVIVING PARENT

*** Talk about your partner; keep their memory alive any way you can**

*** Involve children in your grieving, and the funeral if they want**

*** Admit you are upset; don't be afraid to cry with the children**

*** Don't feel you have to soldier on; ask for help if you need it**

*** Maintain routine for the kids but don't be a martyr**

*** Be honest with children about what has happened.**

FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY

*** Be there and stay there as time goes on**

*** Offer to help but only if it's wanted or needed**

*** Don't feel you can't talk about your lost friend/relative with their partner or children**

*** Don't offer platitudes such as "they've gone to a better place" or "time heals all wounds"**

*** Admit you don't know what to say.**

Source: Caroline Dale, Good Grief

Happier days
The late Megan Tindley with sons Luke and Ben.



RELATIONSHIPS

Women of words

Formidable she may have been to some, but that's not the way a growing daughter saw her mother

MAGAZINE editor Dulcie Boling juggled long hours at work with motherhood but it hasn't hurt her relationship with her daughter.

Dulcie Boling, former editor of *New Idea* magazine

I GAVE up work for eight years when I had my daughters, Kate and Emma. They're only 16 months apart. I went back part-time, getting a job at a local newspaper, after Em started school.

I adored being with the children, but I was bored witless at home. I've always loved working.

When we moved to Sydney, for my husband's work, I saw a staff writer position advertised at *New Idea*.

I thought it'd be a nice, quiet job on this little magazine. I got the job and just loved it. That was in 1976 or '77.

The girls had to have babysitters because in those days you almost had to pretend you didn't have children. They didn't like women with children. It was terribly difficult juggling work and motherhood.

A nice older woman collected them after school and looked after them.

We moved back to Melbourne when I became deputy editor of *New Idea*. A year later I was editor.

I enrolled the girls at MLC (Methodist Ladies' College in Kew), where there was a lot of working mothers. So, for the first time, I didn't feel I was a neglectful mother, I was just a working mother.

I always had the guilts, I have a PhD in guilt, but the girls always used to laugh and say, "Mum, you're always there when we need you".

I wasn't a bad mother. I'm very mumsy, actually. I was so attached to my children but I was attached to my work, too, I still am. I didn't really go out. I did two things — I worked and I went home to the family.

I also took the girls to everything — if I went to the theatre they came too, so lots of opening nights.

As they got older they didn't want babysitters, so they ended up doing more after-school classes than anyone could imagine.

They cooked their own meals.

For 10 of the 15 years I edited I was also chairman and chief executive, so I also ran the company.

People thought I was formidable, but I was just seriously hard-worked. I didn't have time for some of the niceties. I was in the office by 7.30am and wouldn't leave until 8 or even 9 o'clock at night.

I'd go to work six days a week, and work at home on Sundays. I loved it: to me it was no hardship. If I was at the theatre or out at dinner the (magazine) covers would come out to me for a final check before they went on the presses.

My relationship with Emma then

and now is much the same. I adore her. I have more time to spend with her now. There would have been a lot of issues that I just did not address and perhaps was not even be aware of because I was too busy. But when Em was at university I was around. I used to collect her sometimes in the winter months. I'd pick her up, take her home, and I'd have to go back to work.

I loved doing it, and I loved the conversation in the car, and just being close to her. We're very close friends.

I don't have any regrets, I would do the same again.

Emma Boling, writer

WHENEVER I needed Mum she was there for me, and I guess I learnt not to be needy.

It probably made me a bit more independent, but I always knew I had Mum as a backstop. We had a very open relationship. She was always there for me to talk to.

My sister and I did a cordon bleu cooking course after school. It had the

“I AM ... VERY AWARE OF THE GROUNDBREAKING ROLE SHE PLAYED FOR WOMEN

dual effect of keeping us there until Mum could pick us up, but we ate what we cooked, so it also gave us dinner.

Growing up my recollection is of my own cooking and my sister's cooking. We enjoyed it. We'd get to school earlier than everyone else, like at the crack of dawn. It was cold and dark, and no one was there except the cleaners. They used to look after us.

At all the schools I went to I was friends with the cleaners. It gives you a different perspective on life. Their lives were tough, so I saw from an early age how hard people work.

As we grew older we became latchkey kids, so we went home after school rather than doing activities.

It was through Mum I discovered my great passion for horseracing. She'd get members' tickets to the races and take us to Moonee Valley Racing Club, where I'm now a committee member.

I've been heavily involved in racing horses, then breeding them.

As I grew up I became aware my childhood was different from everybody else's in the sense of not just having a working mother, but one who was so successful.

In my final year at school we discussed what we all wanted to do after school. A lot of girls said they'd probably work in a shop until they got married and had children. When they got to me, I said, "What's wrong