**There Is No Wrong Way To Grieve**

a Hearing Men’s Voices program by Temple Sinai Men’s Club, Dresher, PA

**THE NEED**

There is FJMC Hearing Men’s Voices programming for our relationships with our small children and teenagers to our aging parents, but nothing to help with the death of a parent – or other relatives and friends. Many of us have experienced everything from deaths of children to parents, relatives and friends; accidental, suicide, disease and age-related. There are books on a Jewish response to death but many men don’t want to admit they need the help and try to bury their emotions along with the deceased.

HMV’s “encounter group” format (a dozen chairs in a circle) seems the perfect outlet for men to discuss such a sensitive topic and help them understand their response to death. My totally different reactions to my own father’s death 14 years ago and my mother’s two years ago was a motivator to make this program happen.

**THE LEADER**

Having a general manager of a cemetery who works for a large funeral home as a member of our club made it easier to get the program off the ground. Any club that would like to do this program should first check with club members and the synagogue office to see if you have home-grown talent you can use (a good thing to do for any program). If not, contact local Jewish funeral homes, cemeteries, hospices or a Jewish family service or chaplaincy service if one is near you.

A lay person can run the discussion, but it would be best to have someone with knowledge of Jewish funeral/mourning practices. I suggest not using your rabbi as some people may be hesitant for fear of chastisement for non-observance or other issues.

**THE PROGRAM**

1. The leader starts by telling participants that anything that is said in this group is confidential and may not be discussed outside of this room with anyone else. He asks everyone to wait their turn or be respectful of how much time they are speaking and not “hog” the discussion so everyone has an opportunity to speak.

2. The leader briefly introduces himself with some professional and personal background information. He then invites the participants to introduce themselves around the circle, briefly explaining what brought them to this program.

3. The leader may hear something during the introductions that might be a jumping off point for the discussion – anger at God; trying to understand “why”. He could begin with briefly describing different ways people mourn – including the different movements within Judaism or reading a short selection from Rabbi Harold Kushner’s book, When Bad Things Happen To Good People or look at the online resources below.

4. The total time from introductions to conclusion is 60-75 minutes. Throughout the discussion everyone should be given the opportunity to speak. If a lull occurs, the leader should be prepared with a short selection to read or ask open-ended (not yes or no) questions to prompt discussion.

For example:

What did the experience of going through Shiva mean to you?

How has the death of a loved one brought you closer to or further from God?

How do you feel when people tell you to “move on” or “put the past behind you”?

How has the death of a loved one changed your relationships with others?

5. Once the discussion draws to a close the leader thanks the participants; reminds them to sign-in with name/phone/email. We did not do it, but I strongly recommend giving participants a short questionnaire to fill-out before they leave. Make sure you print enough copies and pens are available. See attached “Ticket Out The Door” – I don’t remember if I saw this first at a club, regional or international event, but I love it. You can change the questions as you see fit.

**ONLINE RESOURCES**

When Bad Things Happen To Good People

https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/when-bad-things-happen-to-good-people/

Death & Mourning 101:

https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/death-mourning-101/

Shiva Shifts Toward Shorter And Livelier Jewish Mourning:

https://forward.com/news/194589/shiva-shifts-toward-shorter-and-livelier-jewish-mo/

What Judaism Teaches Us About Grief And Loss

https://forward.com/scribe/373372/what-judaism-teaches-us-about-grief-and-loss/

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

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