



# Beginning Experience

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## Beginning Experience IS ...

- a peer support programme run by people who have suffered the personal loss of a partner through death, divorce or separation. *Beginning Experience* is a 'like-to-like' ministry of persons who, although wounded through the loss of their spouse, have experienced healing and now reach out as "wounded healers" to others who still suffer. All work undertaken by *Beginning Experience* is done on a non-profit, voluntary basis;
- grounded in and is faithful to sound Catholic teachings and the traditions of the Church. The program was started in the USA by Sister Josephine Stewart and Ms Jo Lamia 1973/74. *Beginning Experience* has always been open to persons of all faiths and our Team is keen to ensure that we are welcoming to all. If your personal views do not allow you to fully participate in the short prayers and other celebrations which form part of the program, we invite you to participate in a manner in which you feel comfortable. It is expected that all participants will respect the Christian traditions expressed in the program;
- very concerned about privacy and confidentiality. Please refer to the 'Privacy' document for a more detailed outline of our policies and procedures in regard to these issues;
- a highly structured and formal program. *Beginning Experience* activities are conducted by a local Team and overseen by a Local Board. This Board is, in turn, overseen by a Regional and International Board. Local activities are conducted according to established and published programs, and articulated policies, guidelines and Vision/Mission Statements;
- a copyrighted program which cannot be initiated without the approval of the International Ministry Centre (USA).

**Our Mission:** To enable those who have experienced divorce, separation or death of a spouse or parent to work through their grief, become healed, transformed and free to love.

**Our Vision:** is that these people will work through their grief, be healed, transformed and free again to love themselves, others and God

# Beginning Experience IS NOT ...

- a social organisation. While some members may form close personal friendships and share social activities these are quite secondary to the focus of *Beginning Experience's* peer ministry;
- a 'singles club'. Dating between participants is discouraged - we all need time and space to work through the grief caused by the loss of a life partner. Dating or forming a new relationship too soon after such a loss can often help to 'cover' the immediate pain of grief. The focus of *Beginning Experience's* ministry is to face our pain and work through it with the support of those who are facing the same hurts and fears by undertaking a proven and structured program. Strict guidelines are also given to members of the Team in regard to their personal relationships. For example they may not form 'romantic' relationships with participants within 3 months of a participant's first *Beginning Experience* program;
- a professional counseling service. While Team members undertake training in the *Beginning Experience* program, they have no formal counseling training or experience. It is inappropriate for a participant to seek specific advice in regard to their current situation (eg. in regard to Family Court issues, housing or access problems). It is equally inappropriate for Team to give such advice. It is also inappropriate for a participant to raise such issues as their abuse (sexual, physical, emotional or psychological) of an ex-spouse (if the abuse is continuing) or of a child (at any time) within the context of a *Beginning Experience* program. Such issues are 'outside' the ministry of *Beginning Experience* and may cause moral and ethical dilemmas for Team and participants torn between their desire to help the abuser, the confidentiality of the *Beginning Experience* program, and their need protect the person/people being abused. Some members of Team and some participants (professionals such as health and child-care workers and teachers) may also be under legal obligations to report child abuse. Participants who have suffered as the victims of abuse and who wish to discuss this within the context of their feelings concerning the loss of their partner are encouraged to do so on the understanding that Team cannot re-act in a counseling role.

Those who feel that they require professional guidance or 'one to one' counseling should seek help from local agencies such as: Your General Practitioner who may refer you to a counselor. Many other agencies may be contacted through information centres eg. Citizens Advice Bureau CAB's, Life-line or Government Departments ie. CYPS – Children and Young Persons Service, Work and Income NZ etc. Team members are also encouraged to use their local Church for assistance. The local phone book also lists many agencies available.

