



Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

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The first step toward change is awareness. The second step is acceptance.
-Nathaniel Branden

St. Luke's Hospice

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Does grief *ever* end? Asking when mourning is finished is much like asking how high is up. There's no simple answer. People often assume that grief lasts a short time—a few weeks or months at best. There are exceptions, of course, resilient grievers who for many reasons do adjust quickly. But assuming grief can be mastered quickly can cause unrealistic expectations if sadness continues beyond an arbitrary timeline. Those who work with grieving people generally believe that grief has no absolute end point or timetable. Its duration varies and depends on the circumstances surrounding the loss. With very close relationships, it would be foolish to think that full resolution occurs in less than a year. For many folks, two years is still not long enough to reconcile a loss.

Relying on random time frames for completing grief work often sets people up for failure. Measuring progress against unrealistic benchmarks can cause disappointment and self loathing. Two months after his wife died, a husband was still having trouble sleeping. "I guess I'm not good at this," he said. "I either need sleeping pills, intense therapy or a psychiatrist!"

Death requires adjusting to a world without the deceased. It means acquiring a new mindset and new skills. A spouse may need to learn how to care for a household without his or her partner. A son may have to figure out where to get advice after the death of his parent. A daughter may have to learn how to care for herself after years of caring for an aging parent.

One benchmark that mourning is moving in a positive direction is when a person is able to think of the deceased person without pain. Of course there will still be sadness when reflecting on a loved one who has died, but it's a different kind of sadness, one that lacks the gut-wrenching intensity it previously had. Grief softens and subsides.

Mourning is also progressing in a positive direction when a person begins to reinvest energy in life again. Over time, you begin to feel more hopeful and experience joy again. You adapt to new roles. A man once devastated by the death of his wife began embracing his new role as a grandparent. He reflected on his grandchildren: "They lost their grandmother so I want to be the best grandpa I can be."

There's simply no way to predict how a person will respond to a loss. Grief reactions are not like recipes with given ingredients and certain expected results. Instead of asking when mourning ends, it's more productive to recognize the subtle changes that occur in response to loss. "I used to get enraged when commercials about cancer treatment programs aired on television," a woman once told me. "I don't scream at the television anymore." To her, this *was* progress.

Jean and Lindsey

Signs of Healing

Grief is a process, it's not an event. How will you know when you are making progress on your grief journey?

Below are some observations by bereaved people who have recorded the subtle changes encountered in response to the loss of a loved one. As you read through this list, perhaps you recognize that you, too, have experienced a few sunbeams poking through the clouds:

- ▶ I like going to the cemetery but I don't have to go as often as I used to.
- ▶ I can find something to laugh about.
- ▶ I no longer see the casket in front of the church when I go to services.
- ▶ I can attend funerals and am able to focus on the person who died rather than my own loss.
- ▶ I donated my husband's clothing without feeling disloyal.
- ▶ I completely forgot my wedding anniversary this year.
- ▶ I can tolerate the sound of a baby crying.
- ▶ I go to support group meetings mostly to help the other bereaved people, no longer for myself.
- ▶ I sleep better and am not so tired all the time.
- ▶ I remember my husband as a wonderful hunk of a man. The image of how he looked during his final days is fading.
- ▶ I don't turn off the radio when her favorite song is played.
- ▶ I find that the mention of my child's name may bring tears to my eyes, but it also brings music to my ears.
- ▶ I now like looking at the photographs.

- ▶ I know that Christmas can be merry.
- ▶ I can say, "I'm okay" and really mean it.
- ▶ With time I realize that I'm better able to manage life's new challenges.



Open to Hope

Open to Hope® is a foundation with a mission to help people find hope after loss. Their website, www.opentohope.com, includes articles, books, resources and podcasts from people who have experienced the death of a child, parent, sibling or a spouse. The stories are written to companion grievers at vulnerable time and to help them realize they are not alone in their feelings and thoughts. Articles and interviews are not only informative but also encouraging to those who are just beginning a grief journey. The stories are designed to instill compassion and hope to those in the midst of grief.

Also included on the website are a number of grief resources, materials and organizations that address grief-specific losses. The organization invites people to read and listen as well as to share their own story of hope.

Resources

Newly Bereaved Workshops

Feelings and thoughts are often quite intense after experiencing the death of someone we loved. How do you handle the unpredictable nature of grief? Why does a certain song on the radio suddenly reduce us to tears?

This is why we offer the Newly Bereaved Workshop. It is designed to help participants understand the emotional, physical, social and spiritual impact of loss. Due to popular demand, we're offering more of these workshops in more locations throughout the Lehigh Valley.

The Newly Bereaved Workshops are designed for those who have experienced the death of a loved one within the past 1-3 months and each session will help participants learn grief reactions and coping strategies while honoring the uniqueness of their grief journey. Preregistration is required. Please call (484) 526-2499 to register. Here is a list of the upcoming workshop times and locations:

Wednesday, July 18th from 6-8 pm at Dinkey Evangelical Lutheran Memorial Church, 1742 Dinkey Road, Lehighon – 18212.

Monday, July 23rd from 5-7 pm at St. Luke's Allentown Campus, 1736 Hamilton Street, Allentown – 18104 in the Wieand conference room on the 3rd floor of the east wing.

Thursday, August 23rd from 6-8 pm at St. Luke's Hospital-Monroe Campus, 100 St. Luke's Lane, Stroudsburg -18630 in conference room B (lower level).

Monday, August 27th from 5-7 pm at the Priscilla Payne Hurd Education Center, St. Luke's Hospital-Bethlehem Campus, 801 Os-trum Street, Bethlehem - 18015 in Room 102.

Open/Drop-in Groups

Open/Drop-In Support Groups are designed to offer continued support to bereaved individuals who have already attended grief and loss programs through St. Luke's Hospice. Drop-In/Support Groups afford participants the chance to continue with supportive services. Groups are facilitated by a bereavement counselor but are directed by group members in terms of content and discussion.

We are not currently offering Open/Drop-in Support Groups in Bethlehem and Lehighon, however we do offer them in the following areas:

Easton: First Monday of every month from 4-5 pm at St. Luke's Hospital-Anderson Campus, Medical Office Building, 1700 St. Luke's Blvd, Easton, 18045 in the lower level conference room A.

Quakertown: Second Monday of every month from 6-7 pm (note earlier start time) at St. Luke's Hospital-Quakertown Campus, 1021 Park Avenue, Quakertown, 18951 in the cafeteria conference room.



“We find a place for what we lose. Although we know that after such a loss the acute stage of mourning will subside, we also know that we will never find a substitute. No matter what may fill the gap, even if it be filled completely, it nevertheless remains something else.”

— *Sigmund Freud*

Additional Places to Find Support and Share Your Story

This is a list of free bereavement services in the area. Please call the bereavement office at 484-526-2499 if you are in need of something more that is not on this list or for referrals to other services.

Adult Support Information

Bradbury Sullivan LGBT Community Center— The center offers a professionally led monthly bereavement support group for LGBT people who have experienced loss. The group meets on the 4th Wednesday of each month from 5:30-7:00 PM. Please register with Ariel@bradburysullivancenter.org.

Doylestown Hospital Hospice offers a variety of support groups, including a widow/widower group, a young survivors group and an adult loss group. Visit www.dhospice.com or call Celia Blum at 215-345-2079 for more information.

Gentle Yoga for Grief, Stress and Life Transitions is offered by Wendy Littner Thompson, M.Ed., LPC, RYT. Please contact her at 610-730-1992 for more information about these offerings or visit her website at www.givinggriefavoic.com. Let her know if your loved one was a St. Luke's Hospice patient.

Grief Share is a faith-based grief support group program. Several locations are provided within the Lehigh Valley. Visit www.griefshare.org to find a location near you.

Grand View Hospital Hospice offers many groups and services that change seasonally. Please call 215-453-4210 for more information.

GRASP is a grief recovery after a substance passing and is for families whom have experienced a death due to substance abuse. The support group meets at the 1st Presbyterian Church in Allentown, room 118. A group meets every 1st Monday at 12:00 PM. Please register with Jenny Kemps at 610-422-8490 or email jenkemps@ptd.net. Another group meets every 3rd Monday of the month from 7:00– 8:30 PM. Please register with Nancy Howe at 484-788-9440 or email nancyhowe@gmail.com.

HALOS – CLC (Hope After a Loved One's Suicide – Child Loss Chapter) is for parents, grandparents, and adult siblings who have experienced loss of a child or sibling to suicide. The group meets on the 4th Thursday of the month from 6:30– 8:30 PM at Hughes Library in Stroudsburg, PA. Call to register with Alice Keyes at 570-236-1168 or email at alicekeys00@gmail.com.

Lehigh Valley Health Network offers many groups and services that change seasonally. Please call 215-453-4210 for more information.

The Compassionate Friends offers ongoing support groups for parents, grandparents and adult siblings grieving the loss of a child, grandchild or sibling. Visit their website at www.thecompassionatefriends.org for more information or contact these local chapters: Lehigh Valley Chapter—484-597-0240; Quakertown Chapter—267-380-0130; Easton Chapter—610-866-5468.

VNA Hospice of Monroe County provides an adult support group to anyone who has experienced the death of a loved one within the past year. These groups are held on the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month from 12:00 PM– 1:30 PM at 502 VNA Road, Route 447, East Stroudsburg, PA 18301. Please call 570-421-5390 to learn more.

Pocono VNA offers a grief support group for those who have experienced a death of a loved one within the past 12 months. These groups are held on 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of the month at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Fish Hill Rd., Tannersville, PA 18372. The group begins at 7:00 PM. Call 570-629-1992 for more information.

Children

Lehigh Valley Health Network

Stepping Stones for Children: This special group is a combination of education, arts, activities, and support designed to help facilitate healthy grieving with others of the same age who understand what they are going through. Please call 610-402-7481 to register. The group will meet at 2024 Lehigh Street, Allentown, PA 18103. **Future Session**: September 2018.

New Jersey

Karen Ann Quinlan Hospice 800-882-1117

www.karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement