



Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

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All grief needs to be blessed. In order to be blessed, it must be heard.

~ *Dr. Lani Leary*

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George became incensed when people questioned him about why he attended his ex-wife's funeral. After Julie's 24-year-old son died by suicide, no one called to ask how she was doing. And when Michael's beloved cocker spaniel was put down at the ripe age of 16, he was baffled by responses from friends. "It's a dog," people told him. "You can always get another one."

Each of the above are examples of disenfranchised grief, a type of grief first coined in the 1980s by gerontology professor Kenneth Doka and it refers to the grief one feels when the survivor is not accorded the right to grieve. Can others really deny us the right to feel sorrow and pain? Can they set limits on our grief? Sadly, they can and it happens often for all sorts of reasons.

Disenfranchised grief takes society's expectations to a different level by suggesting who is entitled to grieve and, in turn, who is supported in their grief. Society dictates that we grieve blood relatives but beyond that inner circle of family—the co-workers, step-children and in-laws, for example—society interprets these more distant relationships as less worthy of grief. Disenfranchised grief often occurs when a particular death is stigmatized by society. Death by suicide, abortion, drunk driving and accidental drug overdose frequently cause grievers to hide their guilt, shame, blame and countless other feelings. When a relationship is stigmatized by society, grievers also feel the sting of disenfranchisement. People grieving the death of a same-sex partner, a partner from an extramarital affair or a high-risk peer group such as a gang member may feel their grief is unacknowledged.

Sometimes people disenfranchise their grief with self talk that sounds like this: It feels disloyal to laugh or to be happy... How can I let myself love again if it all comes down to this?...What can I possibly have to look forward to?

The stress of grieving in isolation can be unbearable. Even if you are able to endure the ups and downs of grief work on your own, the healing will be compromised. It is not time that heals, but rather healing that comes from validation. Someone must be present, someone who is willing to hold your pain by listening without judgment or comparison. It is grief that must be blessed.

Jean

When you are grieving a loss that others minimize or ignore ...

1. Acknowledge that your love for the person who has died was significant and that your loss is no less valid. Love is love and loss is loss. Your love was real and valid as is your grief.

2. Remember you're entitled to the time and space to grieve, be it the death of a co-worker, friend, four-legged companion, ex-spouse, etc. So when someone says something dumb and dismisses your feelings (and they will!), remember you have the right to experience your own unique grief. Ignore what other people think and say.

3. Remember you're not alone. It's easy to retreat when your grief is neither acknowledged nor supported. Seek the company of others who have experienced a similar loss. You may find this support through a casual acquaintance (such as the friend of a friend) or even the internet. More groups are popping up for people who have lost a loved one to suicide, overdose, miscarriage, stillbirth and murder. Being in the company of others who've experienced a similar loss enables you to honor your sorrow as well as your memories.

4. Create your own rituals. Perhaps due to the nature of the relationship you had with the person (or pet) who died, you didn't feel comfortable or welcome at the funeral or memorial service. Or perhaps there was none. If it is helpful, consider creating your own rituals or remembrances now. Consider if this is important to you and what may be appropriate. Rituals and remembrances don't have to be elaborate gestures, they could be as simple as planting a tree or visiting a meaningful place.

5. Assess your support system. Although it may feel that none of your family and friends are supportive, think this through before you write everyone off. Sometimes you'll find empathetic people in surprising places. This may be just the time to reach out to a distant friend who lost an ex-spouse, suffered a miscarriage or lost a dear pet.

6. Seek ways to explore and express your emotions. Consider journaling, art, photography and other forms of personal expression. Though you may not have the external support you want, you can still find ways to explore your grief and emotions on your own.

7. Be a support to others experiencing disenfranchised grief. Maybe you're not ready to do this right away, but down the road it's healing to be a support to others whose feelings have been minimized or ignored. Acknowledging others who may feel on the fringe of grief not only helps them recognize and validate their right to grieve, no matter how similar or dissimilar their experience is to yours.



6-Week Spouse/Partner Loss Group

Our upcoming spouse/partner loss group is available to anyone who has lost a spouse, partner or significant other. Losing someone we chose to spend our life with poses unique challenges of loneliness, fear of the future and having to navigate new roles in the family as well as the household. During the 6-week group, participants will explore the unique relationship with the person who has died as well as to explore coping techniques and strategies to reconcile the loss and continue on.

Our next spouse/partner group will be held on Tuesday evenings from 6-8 pm beginning April 7th at St. Luke's Anderson Hospital Campus, 1872 St. Luke's Blvd, Easton, 18045. Meeting dates are April 7, 14, 21, 28, May 5 and May 19. Please note that there is no meeting on May 12. Meetings include information about the grieving process as well as discussion and sharing. Please plan to attend all six sessions as each session builds upon the previous one.

Pre-register early as this group is quite popular and fills up quickly. All St. Luke's bereavement groups and programs are open to the community. To register, call Jean Francis at (484) 526-2514.



Weather Updates

Snowy and icy roads may mean cancelling a bereavement group or meeting. To learn the status of an upcoming event, call the grief counselor in charge of the program and listen to the outgoing message on their office phone. If there's a cancellation, you'll hear about it here.



Drop-In Groups

Drop-In Groups enable you the chance to receive and provide support in a collaborative environment. Groups are facilitated by a grief counselor and participants are invited to suggest topics for discussion. No registration is needed, hence the name "drop-in." You are invited to meet others and explore the struggles and challenges often faced after the death of a loved one. Here are the locations for our current drop-in groups:

Easton: First Monday of every month from 4-5:30 pm at St. Luke's Anderson Hospital Campus, 1872 St. Luke's Blvd, Easton, 18045. Meeting are held in the Medical Office building, lower level conference room A. For more information, contact Tara George at (484) 526-2314.

Quakertown: Second Monday of every month from 6-7:30 pm at St. Luke's Quakertown Hospital Campus, 1021 Park Avenue, Quakertown, 18951 in the cafeteria conference room (lower level of the hospital). For more information, contact Jean Francis (484) 526-2514.

Brodheadsville: Third Tuesday of the month from 1:30-3 pm at the Western Pocono Community Library, 131 Pilgrim Way, Brodheadsville 18322. For directions or more information, contact Jean Francis at (484) 526-2514.

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 or for referrals to other services.

Adult Support Information

Bradbury Sullivan LGBT Community Center at 522 W. Maple Street, Allentown 18101 offers a professionally led monthly bereavement support group for LGBT people who have experienced loss. The group meets on the 4th Tuesday of each month from 5:30-7:00 pm. Please register with Ariel@bradburysullivancenter.org.

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 or contact these local chapters: Lehigh Valley chapter (484-891-0823), Carbon County chapter (484-719-6753), Easton chapter (call Bailey Benner at 610-515-3526) and Quakertown chapter (484-408-7314).

Doylestown Hospital Hospice offers a variety of support groups and programs that change seasonally. Visit www.dhospice.com or call 215-345-2079.

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 or visit her website at www.givinggriefavoice.com to learn more. Please be sure to let her know if your loved one was a St. Luke's Hospice patient.

Grief Share is a faith-based grief support group program offered at many locations in the Lehigh Valley. There is a Grief Share program on Sundays from 2:30-4:30 p.m. at the Mt. Eaton Church in Saylorsburg, 18353. Call (570) 992-7050 for additional information. For other Grief Share locations throughout the area, visit their web site — www.griefshare.org — and enter your zip code to find the location of a group near you.

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

GRASP is for families whom have experienced death due to substance abuse. The daytime support group meets at the First Presbyterian Church in Allentown, room 118 on the first Monday of the month at 12 noon. Please register with Jenny Kemps at 610-422-8490 or email jenkemps@ptd.net. The evening support group meets on the third Monday of the month from 7-8:30 pm. Please register with Nancy Howe at 484-788-9440 or email nancyhowe@ymail.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 610-402-7481 for more information.

Lehigh Valley Home Care & Hospice Pocono's bereavement support group meets on the first and third Wednesdays of the month from 12 noon-1 p.m. Anyone who has experienced the death of a loved one is invited to attend. The support group meets at 502 VNA Road, Route 447, East Stroudsburg, PA 18301. Please call Tammy Hiestand at 272-762-3826 to learn more.

Suicide: The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has excellent information on risk factors, statistics, education and local services. Visit their web site at www.afsp.org and enter your zip code to find the chapter nearest you. All chapters are run by people who have experienced the suicide of a loved one.

Virtual Grief Support is offered by Dr. Don Eisenhauer. Don has a background in counseling and pastoral ministry and runs monthly tele-grief groups and chat room support. Participants either dial in via phone or log in via computer to share with other grievers. For more information about the dates and times of these opportunities, contact Don at onlinegriefcommunity@gmail.com.

Support Information for Children

Lehigh Valley Health Network offers “Stepping Stones for Children” for ages 6 through 17. This is a combination of education, activities and support to help facilitate healthy grieving with others who are the same age. Please call 610-402-7481 to register. The group meets at 2024 Lehigh Street, Allentown, PA 18103.

Support Information in New Jersey

Karen Ann Quinlan Hospice 800-882-1117 www.karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement