



Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

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*No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent,
a part of the main.*
~ John Donne

St. Luke's Hospice

484-526-2499

Grief Support Team:

Alexandra Becker, LSW
Grief Counselor
Alexandra.Becker@sluhn.org
(484) 635-0662

Jean Francis, M.Ed., C.T.
Grief Counselor
Jean.Francis@sluhn.org
(484) 526-2514

Tara George, M.A.
Grief Counselor
Tara.George@sluhn.org
(484) 526-2314

Dawn Cavanaugh
Family Services Administrative
Assistant
Dawn.Cavanaugh@sluhn.org
(484) 526-2499

PLEASE NOTE:

If you would like to be added or removed from our mailing list or prefer to receive the newsletter electronically, please contact Dawn at 484-526-2499.

When a loved one dies, we experience many different thoughts and feelings. Some are painful. This is the interior experience of loss called grieving. Mourning, on the other hand, is the way we express our grief to the outside world. It may be through crying, talking with other people about the death, sharing stories of the person who died, putting together photo albums, journaling and other practices. Mourning is essential because it's through this external process that we begin to heal. When we wear our grief on the outside, we're able to receive compassionate support from other people.

During the coronavirus and the practice of physical distancing, each of us are grieving the loss of normalcy. Those currently grieving the death of a loved one are not able to do so in ways they may be accustomed to. And those wishing to comfort mourners may feel inadequate providing consolation at a distance. Essential mourning practices that enable grievers to confront the finality of loss such as paying final respects, viewing the body and receiving support at funerals, memorial services and celebrations of life have been postponed, curtailed or cancelled altogether.

For thousands of years, these practices have provided a format to acknowledge the reality of death, remember a life that was lived and come to terms with the death. Memorial services can now be streamed via the Web, food can be ordered and delivered, and texts, cards, phone calls and video chats can still keep us connected. But we need to acknowledge that for many, these are not replacements for hugs, physical closeness, homemade casseroles and Bundt cakes.

Grief is often an isolating experience, which is why we have always encouraged mourners to reach out to others, seek counseling or attending support groups. The coronavirus now requires physical distancing. So what do we do with our sadness, fear and anxiety at this time? Turn to page 2 to explore some ways you can maintain connection and well-being.

Jean

Staying Socially Connected

Grief is more than the death of a loved one. It's also the natural response to changes in relationships, employment and health. The coronavirus has ramped up feelings of isolation and anxiety because humans are social beings. Below are some ways to participate in life during the current pandemic:

Spread kindness, not germs: Doing small acts of kindness may be helpful when grieving and they can be done in honor of a loved one. Phone someone to provide words of encouragement, order groceries for them on-line or leave a meal on their doorstep. Be creative.

Seek creative connections: Drive to a parking lot and visit with a friend from the safety and comfort of your cars. Find ways to digitally connect with others using Facetime and other video apps. Seek grief support through websites such as www.whatsyourgrief.com, www.griefnet.org and www.centerforloss.com.

Establish new routines: When daily life is stripped of its rhythm, it's important to create new routines to build structure into the day. While sequestered at home, carve out time for exercise, chores, reading and prayer. Find things you've been longing to do such as learning a language, decluttering a room or tackling home repairs.

Practice self-care: It's important now more than ever to care for yourself emotionally, physically, spiritually and psychologically. Spend time outdoors and breathe fresh air, even if it's a short walk in the neighborhood or sitting outside in a lawn chair. Tune into religious services online. Notice the setting sun and the wildlife in your back yard. Immerse yourself in activities such as reading, adult coloring or putting together a jigsaw puzzle, activities that encourage you to lose

track of time and news updates. Focus solely on whatever activity you're doing as you work to create a state of quiet bliss. Concentrate on breathing in and breathing out. Just be.

Celebrate moments of joy: Embrace the arrival of a robin on the birdfeeder or a sunny afternoon. Cherish a conversation with an old friend. Watch a funny movie or video. Smile. Even better— laugh!

Practice gratitude: The stock market has tanked and a friend is out of work. Is there anything you CAN be grateful for? Even the simple act of searching for something to be thankful for increases neurotransmitter activity in the brain and releases naturally occurring feel-good chemicals.

Create a bucket list: Eventually life will return to normal and calendars will fill with commitments and social engagements. Plan for that now. What do you want to do in the future? Where do you want to go on your next vacation? If you come up short on ideas, call a friend for ideas and inspiration.

Connect With Us

Those of you who regularly receive our monthly newsletter know that we offer drop-in groups, six-week support groups, workshops and short term individual counseling. These activities are on hold for now as we maintain physical distancing.

Do know, though, we're available by phone and email and have been connecting with people who are struggling with sadness, fear and anxiety. Connect with one of us via email or phone. We'd love to help you.

Surviving Mother's Day

While Mother's Day is often a fun family holiday for a lot of people, for others—especially those who have lost a mother or child—it can be marked by pain. The holiday can also trigger memories of not-so-pleasant life situations such as estrangement, infertility and pregnancy complications that can make the day almost intolerable. If you're experiencing dread or anxiety as this day approaches, consider ways to be proactive and take charge:

Make a plan: As with all special days and holidays, think about the day in advance and make a plan for how you want to spend it. Do you want to be alone or with others? How will you create togetherness with physical distancing? What would feel most helpful to you at this time?

Tune out: Take a break from the news and social media for a few days before and after Mother's Day. It may spare you from the constant reminders of loss, sadness or emptiness.

Create a ritual: Rituals help acknowledge feelings and promote healing. They provide structure to an otherwise unsettling time. They also provide a healthy distraction while allowing you to honor your true feelings. Consider lighting a candle, visiting a gravesite or doing an activity that honors the person you're missing.

Ask for support: Don't assume others know how you feel. Talk about your concerns and let them know how they can be supportive. Whether you need a phone call or your privacy respected, allow others the chance to offer support.

Find an outlet. Create positive energy by doing activities you enjoy or that remind you of the person you are missing. Consider listening to music, creating art or enjoying food that honors this person.



Book Review

No book discussed the profound and lasting effects of a mother's death until the publication of *Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss* by Hope Edelman. The book became an instant classic and more than 20 years after its publication, it remains the go-to book that women of all ages have looked to for comfort, help and understanding after a mother dies.

Building upon interviews with hundreds of women who lost their mothers, Edelman weaves the story of losing her mother at age 17 with research in grief and psychology as she reveals the shared experiences and core identity issues of motherless women. Some themes include:

- ▶ Why the absence of a nurturing hand shapes a woman's identity throughout the lifespan
- ▶ How present day relationships are defined by past losses
- ▶ How a woman can resolve past conflicts and move toward acceptance and healing
- ▶ Why grief is not a linear passage but an ongoing cyclical journey
- ▶ How the legacy of mother loss shifts with the passage of time

Because the book is a classic, it can be found on-line and in libraries. Much of the author's work has been devoted to the subject of mothers and daughters and her other books include *Motherless Mothers: How Losing A Mother Shapes the Parent You Become*, *Mother of My Mother: The Intricate Bond Between Generations*, and *Letters From Motherless Daughters: Words of Courage, Grief and Healing*.

Additional Places to Find Support and Share Your Story

Below is a list of free bereavement services in the area. Because of physical distancing, many of these resources can only be accessed online. Please contact our bereavement department at 484-526-2499 if you are in need of additional resources.

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 who 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.

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