



# Comfort for the Grieving Heart

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Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

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*"We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a human experience."  
~ Teilhard de Chardin*

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**PLEASE NOTE:** If you would like to be added or removed from our mailing list, or if you would prefer to receive an electronic copy, please contact Dawn at 484-526-2499.

We often think of grief as an emotional response, one where we experience a range of emotions such as anger, guilt, sadness, loneliness and yearning. Grief can also affect our spirituality. Spiritual doubts and questions may arise after someone we love dies. We may pause to confront and re-think our basic beliefs about God, death, religion and the existence of an afterlife. Some people may turn to God for strength and consolation and find their faith has been deepened or renewed. Others may question the religious teachings they've practiced all their lives and find the foundations of their beliefs shaken to the core. Even people with no religious upbringing may feel angry at God for letting their loved one get sick and die.

Broadly defined, the essence of spirituality is how we find meaning in life. The assumptions that guide our life — that life is fair, that people get what they deserve, that God is benevolent, that the old die before the young, etc. — are strained and sometimes shattered. This collapse in beliefs and assumptions about the world and your place in it can lead to a spiritual crisis regardless of your identification or affiliation with an organized religion. One difficult issue in grief is rebuilding faith or philosophical systems that have been challenged by the death of a loved one.

We all have beliefs that provide a sense of security — that make sense of the world and offer a code of conduct for life no matter where these beliefs originate. But sometimes a loss deeply challenges these notions and leads to a crisis of belief. Parents mourning the death of their child are especially prone to this type of crisis because of the unique and powerful bond between parent and child. A child's death defies the natural order in life. A crisis in belief can also occur when someone is diagnosed with a protracted disease such as dementia or Lou Gerig's disease, where the quality of life is compromised and the suffering is viewed as intolerable.

Not all deaths cause a spiritual crisis. Yet when loss challenges our beliefs and assumptions, it's important to acknowledge just how normal this reaction is. Sometimes we may feel frightened that we are losing our faith. Yet periods of doubt are also part of the cycle of belief. Recognize that a new faith can grow from grief, into a deeper, more mature understanding of the divine dimension of life. Sometimes meaning must be lost before it can be found.

*Jean Francis*

### When Dealing with Questions of Faith

Not everyone shares the same cultural, religious or spiritual beliefs about death and the after-life. Death often forces us to confront spiritual questions we haven't taken time to address, questions that get at the heart and meaning of life: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?

Whether a strong religious faith or a spiritual belief helps or hinders you often depends on what you believe and how these beliefs are practiced. What religion and spirituality cannot do is give us immunity from loss or provide a shortcut through grief. In the book, *Life After Loss* pastoral counselor Bob Deits identifies a few beliefs that may be *harmful* — believing that death is God's will and should not be questioned or that there must be a grand plan or purpose (a *why*) for every death. Instead Deits offers a few beliefs that may be more helpful— that this is a mortal, frail and imperfect world where tragedies do occur and that there is no satisfactory explanation when loss occurs. The question to ask yourself is not *why me*, but rather *if me*, then what can I learn from this loss?

Deits encourages people to move away from the *why* questions to the *how* questions: How can you work through loss and achieve as full a life as possible? How do you find meaning in life without this person? How do you start anew? How can you use this experience to help someone else? If you are struggling with unfamiliar spiritual reactions or a crisis in faith, consider these strategies:

► Talk with a minister, priest or rabbi — yours or someone new. The inherent nature of spirituality is based on connection, which can be a great comfort when grieving. Explore and question the values and beliefs you've accepted in the past and formulate new ones when you need to.

Speaking with a spiritual leader or counselor may help you find a pathway to new or renewed faith.

► Make space in your schedule for daily meditation, prayer, nature or music. Spending even a few minutes can restore inner peace and be a source of strength and consolation. These practices are simple and can be practiced anywhere at any time.

► Practice rituals. Perhaps you find comfort in rituals that your faith community provided or you may need to look deeper inside, examining, modifying or creating new rituals as you adjust to life without a loved one. This may be especially true if the loss was sudden, traumatic or intentional.

► Become a student. If you're struggling with faith and spirituality, explore different points of view. Every form of spirituality has books and teachers to turn to when trying to make sense from a loss. We share four resources on page 3.

New research on dying, mourning and spirituality suggests the ways people rediscover meaning may be less important than the process of searching itself. In other words, the ability to re-ascribe meaning to a changed world through spiritual transformation, religious conversion or philanthropy may be more significant than the specific content by which that need is filled.





### Exploring Your Spirituality

**Life after Loss** by Bob Deits is the go-to resource for anyone who has suffered a significant life change. With great compassion and insight, Deits provides practical exercises for navigating the uncertain terrain of loss and grief, helping readers find positive ways to put together a life that is necessarily different, but equally meaningful.

**Praying Our Goodbyes** by Joyce Rupp offers wisdom on the experience of leaving behind and moving on, the stories of union and separation. *Praying Our Goodbyes* is about the spirituality of change and is for anyone who has experienced loss – a job change, the end of a relationship, the death of a loved one, a financial struggle, a mid-life crisis or an extended illness. The book helps readers reflect, ritualize and re-orient themselves--to help heal the hurts caused by goodbyes and anxieties encountered when one season of life ends and another begins.

**A Grief Observed** by C. S. Lewis is an honest reflection on the fundamental issues of life, death and faith in the midst of loss. It was written after his wife's tragic death and it contains his concise, genuine reflections on that period. This classic book is a beautiful and unflinchingly honest record of how even a stalwart believer can lose all sense of meaning in the universe, and how he can gradually regain his bearings.

**When Things Fall Apart** by Pema Chodron offers how to live life when everything seems to be falling apart. The answer might be just the opposite of what you expect. Moving toward painful situations and becoming intimate with them can open up our hearts in ways we never imagined. The book draws from traditional Buddhist wisdom and offers life-changing tools for transforming suffering and negative patterns into habitual ease.

### Grief Support For You

**Individual Support:** Our three grief counselors are available for telephone counseling sessions to provide support and information. Names and phone numbers of each counselor are listed on the front page of the newsletter.

**Drop-In Groups:** Drop-in groups enable participants to receive and provide support in a collaborative environment. We currently offer three groups and two are held virtually. Each group is facilitated by a grief counselor. For information about the monthly Monday drop-in group, contact Tara George. Contact Alexandra Becker for information about the monthly Tuesday drop-in group. The Brodheadsville group meets in person at the Western Pocono Community Library, 131 Pilgrim Way, Brodheadsville 18322 on the third Tuesday of each month from 1:30-3 p.m. Participants must wear masks. Contact Jean Francis for more information.

**24/7 Virtual Online Library:** We offer online educational support videos to help you understand and cope with grief after the loss of a loved one. These videos can be accessed at any time from anywhere. Check out various topics by clicking onto this link: [www.slhn.org/griefsupport](http://www.slhn.org/griefsupport)

**Monthly Newsletter:** Our newsletter is available to anyone who can benefit from receiving it, regardless of when or how the death occurred. If you would like to either start or continue receiving our newsletter via regular mail or email, kindly call our office at (484) 526-2499.



## 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](mailto: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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://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](http://www.karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement)