



# Comfort for the Grieving Heart

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*Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program*

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**“No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear” - C.S.Lewis**

**St. Luke's Hospice**

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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.

As we enter into this New Year, many of us might be thinking about new resolutions or changes we want to see ahead. I, for one, am certain there are no new ways to say that 2020 was an unusual year for most of us. For many, the past year represents a time of stress, confusion and wandering deeply into the unknown. We have all carried our individual and communal grief experiences through this past year, both for feelings of normalcy and for our loved ones who are not here.

When embarking on a new year, it's natural to wonder how we can make this year different. You might feel hope. Hope that things will be brighter and warmer than they have been. You might feel fear. How can we move forward through the fog when we still don't know what comes around the corner? When we experience a loss, it's common to experience an increased fear of the unknown. We can feel a loss of safety and a loss of control over what happens to us. We might feel deeply aware of how little control we have.

It can be easy to feel lost when we don't feel empowered. Empowerment is the process of becoming stronger and more confident, specifically related to controlling one's life. This is an ongoing process that takes time, effort and support to engage in. This is never more true after a loss when our feelings of control have been taken away from us.

How can we feel more empowered? Often empowerment comes over time, from lots of little acts that make us feel like we have choices and are free to make the choices that best serve our needs. This can give us a sense of control and greater peace.

So what can we control? Maybe we can control the way we make a meal, preparing it just the way we like it. Maybe we can reach out and call a friend. Maybe we can commit to going for a walk every day, even on the coldest days. Maybe we can decide to learn how to lower our anxiety with deep breathing. Maybe we can seek the support of a therapist and deepen our understanding of ourselves. The beauty of starting a journey of self empowerment is that it is an ongoing practice and it looks different on everyone.

I want to take this time to encourage us all to seek spaces that make us feel empowered and to ask ourselves the tough questions about how we can take on the enormous task of building lives that serve our hopes, rather than feed our fears.

*Alexandra K. Becker*

### Ideas for Increasing Empowerment in Uncertain Times

**Increase engagement in hobbies and self care activities:** This looks different for everyone. It might mean that you take a nap when you feel like it, just because you chose to. It might mean that you make yourself breakfast and sit in the sun without being rushed. It could mean making things or taking the space to build a new routine. Asking ourselves what choices we do have to impact the outcome of the day ahead can increase feelings of freedom and control, even through small actions.

**Carve out space and limit feelings of being rushed:** This might mean sitting in your car with a nice drink in the quiet before going into a crazy work day. It might look like taking a few deep breaths after a busy morning. Finding pockets of time that are yours and that offer you space to get in touch with yourself can help strengthen that feeling of connection with oneself.

**Seek out things that feel comforting for you:** This could be time with a friend you trust or even investing in your living spaces to make them more aligned with what you like. It might also mean limiting the things you feel you “should” do and prioritizing the things that actually feel good to engage in.

**Seek out mental health support:** While we always encourage outreach to our grief counselors (see front page for contact information), we also want to take this time to stress the value of mental health support during times of grief. Grief can take a toll on our mental health from ongoing experiences of isolation, exhaustion, depression and anxiety. It’s important to know that mental health support and seeing someone weekly can be used as a uplifting tool towards self care, rather than a last resort in an emergency. Many people can find clarity and personal growth through ongoing work with a counselor, but it is also common to not know where to

start with finding someone you would like to work with. Below are a few helpful places to begin, if this feels correct for you and your needs:

- If you do have health coverage, begin looking at your health insurance providers site to see what providers might be available to you. Often, insurance companies offer websites with tools to filter a search based on what you might be looking for (i.e. distance, specialty areas, gender of the provider, etc.). Explore these and see if anyone within your network looks appealing to you.
- It can be overwhelming to start looking for a counselor for the first time, especially when you are unsure what questions to ask or who would be a good fit for you. Ask yourself more about what traits would make you feel trusting and comfortable with a provider in terms of personality and style. Looking for a therapist can be a shopping process and not every provider is the right fit for everyone. We recommend calling to ask if someone is taking new clients and speaking on the phone before scheduling a session to get a feel for your personal comfort level.
- Remember you’re trying to hire someone that is the right fit for you. That person might not be the first person you speak with and that’s okay!



### Ongoing Grief Support

All in-person support groups and workshop offerings have been on hold in compliance with CDC and Pennsylvania state guidelines. Some groups will resume online in the coming weeks.

**Individual support:** Our three grief counselors are available by cell phone for phone and video sessions to provide support and information. Contact information for us is on page 1 of this newsletter.

**Video Library:** St. Luke's website includes a dozen short videos that provide information about the grieving and mourning process and ways to care for yourself during these tender times. To view, go to <https://www.slhn.org/vna> and click on the hospice heading. On the left side of the screen under the VNA heading, click onto grief support. About halfway down this page, click onto the video library heading "Want to understand your grief?" Access the library by answering the question about your connection with St. Luke's Hospice (if any). Then view the videos from the comfort of your home.

**Virtual Support Groups:** These groups enable participants the chance to receive and provide support in a collaborative environment. They are facilitated by a grief counselor and participants are invited to suggest topics for discussion.

The former Brodheadsville group is an open group that meets virtually on the third Tuesday of the month from 1:30-3 pm and all are welcome to join. For more information on how to connect using the Microsoft Teams platform, contact Alexandra Becker at (484)-635-0662

Our second online open group meets on the 2nd Tuesday of each month from 4-5:30 p.m. Please contact Tara George at (484) 523-0833 to connect using the Microsoft Teams platform.

**Coming soon!** A walking group for grieverers. If interested, contact Tara George at (484) 526-0833.

### 8-Week Mindfulness Group

We're offering a mindfulness based stress reduction group for grieverers that will meet virtually for eight Friday afternoons from 3-4:30 p.m. beginning March 5th. Participants will practice and utilize various strategies to reduce anxiety and stress from the loss of a loved. To register, call Alexandra Becker at (484) 635-0662. The next spouse/partner loss

### Spouse/Partner Loss Group

group will meet virtually on six Thursday nights from 7-9 p.m. beginning March 25, April 1,8,15,22 and April 29. During these sessions, participants will explore the unique relationship they had with their spouse or partner and learn strategies to reconcile this loss. To register, call Jean Francis at (484) 225-9269.

### New Year's Resolutions for the Bereaved

#### This year I resolve to:

- Not put a time limit on my grief.
- Tell their stories, the happy and the sad, they will live on through me.
- Understand that crying or otherwise expressing how I'm feeling is natural.
- Recognize that asking for help from those who love us is really a gift we give them.
- Reaching out to others in pain might help me heal.
- Cry when I need to, laugh when I can and not feel guilty about either one.
- Let go, bit by bit of the guilt, regret and anger because I know holding onto these will damage me.
- Take care of my physical, emotional and spiritual health.
- Reinvest in life a little bit each day.

*by Tanya Lord*

## *Additional Places to Find Support and Share Your Story*

**Below is a list of free bereavement services in the area. Because of the pandemic and physical distancing, many resources are being offered 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** offers bereavement support for LGBT people who have experienced loss. For more information, visit their website at [www.bradburysullivancenter.org](http://www.bradburysullivancenter.org) or contact Reilly at [reilly@bradburysullivancenter.org](mailto:reilly@bradburysullivancenter.org).

**The Compassionate Friends** offers ongoing support 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). Enter your zip code to locate the local chapter and contact person nearest you.

**Doylestown Hospital Hospice** offers a variety of support groups and programs that change seasonally. Visit their website at [www.doylestownhealth.org/hospital/services/bereavement](http://www.doylestownhealth.org/hospital/services/bereavement) or call 215-345-2079.

**Gentle Yoga for Grief, Stress and Life Transitions** is currently being offered virtually by Wendy Littner Thompson, M.Ed., LPC, RYT. Visit her website at [www.givinggriefavoices.com](http://www.givinggriefavoices.com) or contact her at 610-730-1992 to learn more. Be sure to indicate if your loved one was a St. Luke's Hospice patient.

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

**Grief Share** is a faith-based grief support group program offered at many locations throughout the Lehigh Valley. Visit their website at [www.griefshare.org](http://www.griefshare.org) and enter your zip code to find the contact person nearest you.

**Grief Support for Substance Related Losses (GRASP):** The Oasis Community Center in Bethlehem provides grief support for adults who have lost a loved one from substance-related losses. They hold both in-person and virtual groups that are led by therapists. Visit their website at [www.oasisBethlehem.org](http://www.oasisBethlehem.org) for more information. A second GRASP group meets virtually two evenings a month. Contact the leaders Nancy Howe (484-788-9440 or [nancyhowe@ymail.com](mailto:nancyhowe@ymail.com)) or Tim Howe (646-401-4458 or [howet60@yahoo.com](mailto:howet60@yahoo.com)).

**Lehigh Valley Health Network** offers many groups and services including programs for children between the ages of 6 through 17. For more information about program offerings for adults and children in the Lehigh Valley, call 610-402-7481. For information about program offerings in the Pocono area, contact Bryson.Boes at 272-762-3826 or via email at [Bryson.Boes@lvhn.org](mailto:Bryson.Boes@lvhn.org).

**Suicide Loss:** 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 and contact person nearest you. All chapters are run by people who have experienced the suicide of a loved one.

### **Support Information in New Jersey**

**Karen Ann Quinlan Hospice** offers support to those who have experienced the death of a loved one. For more information, call 973-948-2283 or visit their website at [www.karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement](http://www.karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement)