

Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

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“Even the saddest things can become, once we have made peace with them, a source of wisdom and strength for the journey that still lies ahead.” ~ Frederick Buechner

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

During the Covid pandemic, many public rituals we used to observe after the death of a loved one have either been canceled, limited in size and scope or postponed. There are, however, a number of private rituals that a grieving person can create and observe to encourage and promote healing.

A ritual is a specific behavior or activity that gives symbolic expression to certain thoughts and feelings. They give form, structure and meaning to our feelings and provide a way to remember the person who has died. Since they acknowledge the physical loss of a loved one while allowing the memories to continue, they can also encourage the griever to form a new relationship with the person who died.

Rituals can be done on a regular basis or just once. There are no hard and fast rules for creating and observing them. The most important thing to consider is that the ritual should originate from the person's individual narrative of grief and loss rather than being imposed on the person. What is healing for one person may not be for another person. For the ritual to be meaningful, it must come from them and their unique experience with the person who died. Rituals can be private or witnessed by small or large audiences—whatever feels appropriate to the griever.

A ritual should include visual objects chosen for their symbolism. A necklace, a favorite teacup, a picture or something from a place they loved, a ball or object from a sport that was a big part of their life—things that can be seen, touched and felt help to strengthen the ritual's meaning. And finally, a ritual should be planned to have the greatest impact. Because rituals involve our minds, emotions, spirits and bodies, they can harness healing power and help us understand what we have lost.

Creating and observing private rituals can give a person a semblance of control in life, enabling them to better cope with the ebb and flow of grief. Personal rituals are not quick-fixes for grief, but they can help us sort through thoughts and feelings while gaining a different perspective on changes that have happened in life. Sometimes these little actions can provide us with a moment of peace or purpose to help us make it through a difficult day.

Therapeutic Rituals to Create and Celebrate A Loved One

Dr. Kenneth Doka developed the concept of a therapeutic ritual. He described four rituals that may be helpful to those who are grieving. Here is a look at each of them and how they can be used.

Rituals of continuity emphasize the enduring bond with the deceased. One family commemorates their 17-year-old son's death by gathering friends and family on his birthday to release candle-driven sky lanterns over the ocean. Watching the release of all these lanterns into the sky at night has been a powerful and healing symbol to family and friends and a dramatic expression of their love. Simple rituals that mark a difficult date such as visiting a gravesite, attending a church service or expressing your love out loud can help you release and process the pain of loss.

Rituals of reconciliation tend to finish business, allowing the griever to express or receive forgiveness or to offer a last message or simple farewell. These rituals can enable the griever to voice feelings that otherwise would be bottled up without the opportunity for expression or resolution. The son or daughter who didn't make it to the bedside before a parent dies can express their love and appreciation and say goodbye in a letter. An estranged son or daughter can make peace. A spouse can finally let go and forgive. All of these help the individual to process feelings and begin to move forward on their grief journey.

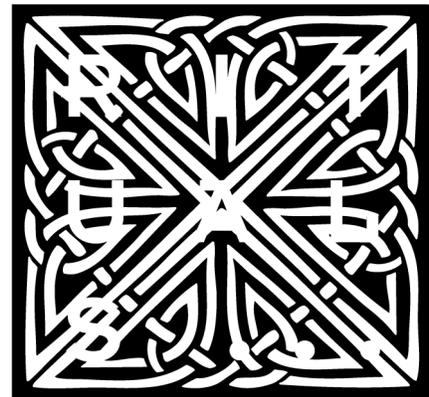
Rituals of transition mark some kind of movement or change in the grieving process. They can empower the individual with a before and an after, thus giving them the ability to feel momentum in their grieving process. The divorce of his parents and subsequent parental disinterest troubled Kevin deeply. A few months later, Kevin removed the plaque from the garage wall he had made in shop class that read "Daddy's Garage." Carefully he

pulverized the plaque and announced to his mother that it was no longer "Daddy's Garage." Kevin then took over the space for himself.

Rituals of affirmation enable the griever to thank the deceased for his or her presence and legacies. Roberta and her mother used to spend days in the kitchen before the Christmas holidays, mixing and baking cookies and cakes for their large extended family. It was a passion they both shared. For years after her mother's death, Roberta could not face the task of baking alone. One year she started baking again, and delivered the first batch of cookies to her aunt, her mother's sister, as a way to honor her mother for teaching her the family recipes and baking techniques. Now whenever she does her holiday baking, she fondly remembers her mother and the special moments they shared together.

Need a few ideas to create a ritual of your own? Here are a few more:

- Keep something in your pocket or purse that reminds you of your loved one.
- Volunteer or donate to a cause they supported.
- Keep their name alive by using their name or nickname as part of a computer password.
- Get a tattoo in their memory.



Things to Do on Mother's Day

Mother's Day can be a fun family holiday for many people. But for those who have experienced the death or loss of a relationship with a mother or a child, it can be a painful reminder of what no longer remains. The date can also trigger memories of the not-so-pleasant events such as estrangement, infertility and pregnancy complications, to name a few.

The heightened marketing and social media frenzy around this day often forces us to reflect on motherhood. If you are struggling with this upcoming Mother's Day, here are a few things to consider:

1. **Make a plan** – Think about the day in advance and how you want to spend it – alone or with others. Have a plan in advance that feels acceptable to *you*.
2. **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 additional reminders that might otherwise be unavoidable.
3. **Create a ritual** – Try an idea from this newsletter and create your own way to observe and remember your mother (or child).
4. **Ask for support**—Tell others how you are feeling about the day and let them know what would be helpful to you. Whether it's a phone call or respecting your privacy, give people a chance to lend you a hand.
5. **Find an outlet** – Create positive energy by doing an activity that you enjoy.



Grief Support for You

Despite the growing availability of Covid vaccinations, St. Luke's Hospice must continue to abide by the CDC and Pennsylvania Department of Health guidelines for public gatherings. For this reason, all in-person support groups and workshops are still on hold. Here are the support options we offer to you at this time:

Individual support: Three bereavement counselors provide support and information through telephone and video sessions. Contact information is on page one 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 them, go to <https://www.slnh.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 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 bereavement counselor and participants are invited to suggest topics for discussion.

One online group meets virtually on the 2nd Tuesday of each month (**May 9, 2021**) from 4-5:30 p.m. For more information, contact Tara George at (484) 523-0833. A second online group meets virtually on the third Tuesday of the month (**May 16, 2021**) from 1:30-3 p.m. For more information, contact Alexandra Becker at (484)-635-0662.

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 may only be offered virtually. Please contact our bereavement department at 484-526-2499 if you need additional support.

Adult Support Information

Bradbury Sullivan LGBT Community Center offers bereavement support for LGBT people who have experienced loss. For more information, please visit www.bradburysullivancenter.org or contact Reilly at 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 www.thecompassionatefriends.org. Enter your zip code to locate the local chapter and contact person near 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 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 www.givinggriefavoices.com or call 610-730-1992. Be sure to indicate if your loved one was a St. Luke's Hospice patient.

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

Grief Share is a faith-based support group offered throughout the Lehigh Valley. Visit their website at www.griefshare.org and enter your zip code to find the contact person and program near you.

OASIS Community Center offers a variety of support groups to those grieving a loss due to substance related causes. Therapist-led meetings are held in-person and virtually for bereaved parents and young adults (siblings, partners, friends, etc.). Groups for bereaved youth ages 7-17 and bereaved caregivers raising bereaved children are offered in-person. For dates and times, visit www.oasisbethlehem.org, call 484-747-6825 or email at rhonda@oasisbethlehem.org to register.

GRASP (Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing) currently offers two virtual evening meetings per month, plus an afternoon meeting at the Oasis Center. Contact Nancy Howe at nancyhowe@ymail.com or 484-788-9440 or Tim Howe at howet60@yahoo.com or (646-401-4455).

Lehigh Valley Health Network offers many groups and services for adults and children between the ages of 6-17. For more information, call 610-402-7481. For information about program offerings in the Pocono area, contact Bryson Boes at 272-762-3826 or Bryson.Boes@lvhn.org.

Suicide Loss: The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has excellent information on risk factors, statistics, education about suicide. Visit www.afsp.org and enter your zip code to find the chapter/contact person near 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 are grieving the death of a loved one. For more information, call 973-948-2283 or visit www.karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement