



Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

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“Sleep is that golden chain that ties health and our bodies together.”

St. Luke's Hospice

484-526-2499

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As daylight wanes and the air turns crisp and cool, people who are grieving the death of a loved one usually dread the approaching holidays. In reality, though, holidays and significant days are peppered throughout the year, often catching grievers off guard. One man told me that last Halloween was a night-mare as his wife had been the decorator and the costume designer for their five children. As he attempted to greet trick-or-treaters, he was suddenly overcome by memories of Halloweens past. Eventually he retreated indoors and turned off the porch light.

Holidays can trigger pangs of sadness among families whose loved ones were in the military. There are the significant days only your family observes, the birthdays, anniversaries and graduations that will now be celebrated without a loved one. And there are the not-so-happy dates that are for-ever etched in memory. Was it *only* a year earlier that you and your loved one heard the words metastatic cancer?

Suddenly the calendar feels like a dance through a field of landmines. What's a griever to do? Here are a few ideas to help you on difficult days:

Choose your focus - When we're grieving, our expectations of holidays and special days can lead to unnecessary stress. Recognizing and accepting that a holiday or a significant day isn't going to be the same as in the past shows compassion for yourself and others. When you choose what's important to you rather than letting others choose for you, you give yourself a much better chance of moving through a difficult day with less stress.

Respect your boundaries - As you choose your focus, consider also your boundaries. What can you do that feels safe and comfortable and what will cause worry and stress? For some people, it's hard to eat, socialize or even to find energy to participate in activities. Other grievers find that being with people, food and activity either helps them handle their grief or enables them to briefly forget about it. Establishing healthy boundaries for yourself is an act of self-care that can keep you from intensifying the pain you feel and help you pace yourself as you find your "new normal."

Accept help - In the same way you choose your focus and establish boundaries, allow others to help you. You don't need to do everything you've done in the past. Asking for and accepting help especially during a significant day is truly an act of kind, thoughtful self-care. In fact, it is a gift to those that care about you and want to support you.

Holidays & Grief

One of the best ways to survive the holidays after the death of someone you loved is to plan ahead. Regardless of what you do, there is no way to avoid having to deal with pain and sadness. No one can offer you a way around this and despite the temptation, try to avoid canceling the holidays altogether. Accept the fact that parts of the holiday are not going to be easy. They will be different because life is now different but keep these points in mind: As we continue to move through the many chapters of this pandemic, we also look to be as graceful as possible with both ourselves and others.

Set realistic expectations of yourself. Grieving takes energy. Be gentle with yourself and your family and allow yourself to take whatever time for yourself that you need.

Surround yourself with people who love and support you. Find those people who accept your feelings, who understand that the holidays are more difficult, and who allow you to express all that you are feeling.

Talk about your grief and about the person who has died. Share your feelings and memories with people you trust. Say the person's name and invite others to do the same.

Don't get caught up in unreasonable expectations. Losses and separations of all kinds make this a difficult season. For many of us, the holidays produce more stress and pain than joy. In light of this, there's no reason for guilt or for wondering if your grief is "ruining" the holidays for others. You don't need to provide the perfect holiday for anyone.

Embrace your memories. Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after someone dies. Sharing and hearing stories, crying and laughing together keeps the person who died part of these special days.

Take care of yourself. Avoid using alcohol or drugs to self-medicate your mood. Physical exercise is often a healthier antidote for sadness or depression.

Create a new tradition or ritual that accommodates your current situation. Some people find comfort in the old traditions while others find them unbearably painful. Discuss with your family the activities you want to include or exclude this year.

Tell others what you need. Make them aware of the times that may be particularly rough for you and make suggestions on ways they can support you.

Seek comfort in your faith. If your faith is important, seek out a familiar and supportive community to provide solace.

Remember that your grief is important and unique. Be patient with yourself, love your-self and don't let anyone take away your grief. Do know that there are times, despite your best efforts when nothing will seem to work. So remember—be gentle with yourself and with your family.

*"We are all just walking each
other home"*

- Ram Das

Grief Support for You

St. Luke's Hospice abides by CDC and Pennsylvania Department of Health guidelines for public gatherings during these challenging times. All support groups and workshops continue to be held virtually. Here are support options we currently offer:

Individual support: Our bereavement counselors provide support and information **through video and telephone counseling sessions**. Our contact information is on the front page of this newsletter.

Good Grief Workshops: These 90-minute workshops are offered virtually twice a month to provide you with a better understanding of what grief is, how it may affect you emotionally, physically, spiritually and psychologically, coping strategies and ways to reconcile the loss. For more information and to receive an invitation to join the meeting, call (484) 526-2499. You will be asked to download the Microsoft Teams app on your smart phone or computer. Workshop offerings include a daytime and an evening option each month:

November 9th 1PM-2:30PM, Tuesday

November 30th 6PM-7:30PM, Tuesday

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 after a loss. To view the videos, 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 on grief support. About half-way 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.

Annual Luminaria Lighting:

Some of you have experienced our annual Luminaria Lighting in years past. Our annual Luminaria Lighting ceremony provides the opportunity for family and friends to honor the memory of their loved one. We also honor the memory of those who have served in recognition of Veterans Day. As always, all of our services are available to the community even if your loved one was not on our hospice service.

This year our 9th Annual Luminaria Lighting will be held on November 13th from 5:30—6:30 PM at Becky's Drive-In, 4548 Lehigh Drive, Walnutport, PA 18088. It will be held rain or shine. We will be following current CDC guidelines at this event.

Registration is required and can be completed online at slhn.org/2021Luminaria or by calling 484-526-3057. The Luminaria Lighting is one of the multiple ways that St. Luke's Hospice honors and memorializes those who have died.

Memorializing can be an important activity for anyone who has experienced a loss of a loved one. Many experience a form of memorializing through funerals, memorial activities, and/or celebration of life **ceremonies**. These memorializing activities can take place soon after a loved one dies or sometime in the future as determined by the bereaved. COVID has definitely impacted that way in which we memorialize our loved ones and when. We can memorialize in so many different ways including through photos, stories, memory boxes, special occasions, death anniversaries, birthdays, and holidays.

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 the need for 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 their website at www.bradburysullivancenter.org or email 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.

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. Call 484-788-9440 or Call/Email 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, call 272-762-3826 or email Bryson.Boes@lvhn.org.

Suicide Loss: The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has excellent information on risk factors, statistics and 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.