

Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

April 2021

"Nature is the kind of friend that never leaves my side. Even in grief-stricken times, in her soul I can confide."
~ Angie Welland- Crosby

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.

Spring is starting now as we enter the month of April. Many of us have had a winter full of cold, snow, and isolation in our homes. Now that the days are getting warmer and longer, we can feel the small waves of hope and fresh smells from the new season. There is a feeling of rebirth and renewal rolling in for many. But this change, like all changes that come when we are in grief, can be confusing.

It's normal to feel anxious surrounding the changing of the seasons while we grieve. Spring generally brings a sudden flurry of change and things begin to move faster all around us. We might feel like we should be happier or we may even feel guilty when we are happy without our loved one. It might spur a deep sensation of how time is continuing to pass without the person we really want to have with us. We might feel more pressure to engage in things that feel overwhelming. We might feel far away from the person we were last spring. Sometimes we might just wish for cold rainy or snowy days because they feel more aligned with the feelings we have in our hearts. This can be deeply painful for some.

Regardless of what feelings come up for you, they are acceptable and okay to feel. Sometimes, taking care of ourselves requires stepping away from what we think we "should" be feeling and listening to the messages that our hearts and bodies are giving us about what *actually* feels right.

One of the ways we can reclaim a feeling of connectedness with ourselves can be to get outside and to engage with the things that we can control within our lives. We can control if we sit in the sun. We can control if we move our bodies more in ways that feel good. Those of us who feel like getting our hands dirty might turn to gardening. It can even be as simple as taking more deep breaths and noticing spring smells and changes as we exhale. Give yourself permission to enjoy what you enjoy deeply and whenever possible. Lean in when you can.

Another way to engage with all this change is to be mindful of how the world around you is waking up. Note the sounds you hear, the smells, the way a flower or tree might change day to day around you. Nature provides a visual of how those that look dormant can change and reopen again in new ways, but only when their time comes. It shows a model of resilience and that there is a season for everything.

This spring might not feel like yours right now. It might feel like exactly what you need. Either one is correct and allowed. The process of grief cannot be forced or rushed. It is part of our nature and requires self-grace, time, and patience as we work on our unique, always changing, healing journey. Spring will come again.

Alexandra Becker

Soothing Activities When Spring Doesn't Match Your Feelings

Long Walks—We can walk with friends or spend time alone in our favorite spots in nature. It can be a space to reflect on the sounds and complexity of the trees around us and can offer a great peace when everything inside us might feel chaotic or overwhelmed. Contact grief counselor Tara George to join our upcoming walking grief group that is happening this Spring.

Gardening—Getting your hands dirty can be therapeutic. Investing in something for the future is inherent in the act of gardening and can offer a simple and a soothing quiet space to be with ourselves in nature.

Bird Watching—Another excellent way to find stillness and quiet as we take in the world around us without it feeling like it's overpowering us. This can even be done from the windows of our home.

Bonfires and Fire Pits—Sitting around a fire, either with your household or friends can feel deeply connected and simple. It allows us to be with others and with our thoughts, however feels right.

Go On a Picnic—Just getting some sun on our face as we eat a good meal can do a world of good for a moment of a day.

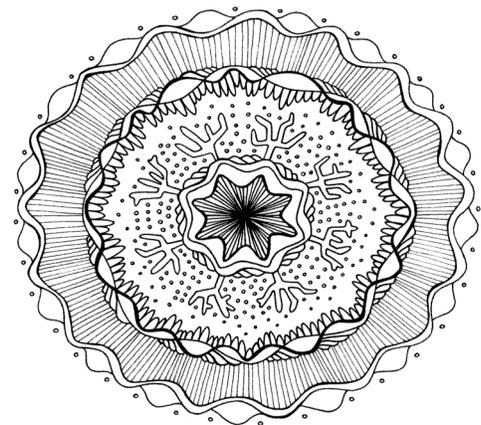
Think Before You Commit—No need to over-commit to things that don't feel right. Remember "no" is a full sentence. Well-meaning persons in your life might push you to engage with others when you don't feel up to it.

Change the Scenery—Take a drive if you like driving. Take in the moving space around you and explore from the space of your car.

Virtual Grief Support—Check out St. Luke's online grief support videos by visiting <https://www.slnh.org/vna>. These videos provide information about the grieving and mourning process and ways to care for yourself during these tender times.

Try to Meditate—Engage with meditation in spaces that feel safe and soothing for you. Finding a quiet space in a mind that is exhausted can be challenging. Learning to use deep breaths to nourish ourselves during grief can be an incredible skill. YouTube videos and classes can help you engage with this skill to support yourself.

Begin a Ritual—Work with rituals that honor and engage you with your loved one. This can mean a seat at the table during a holiday. It can mean visiting a grave site. It can mean having an outdoor memorial that feels connected to you and your family's needs. Listen to what feels right for you and not what you feel you "should" do.



On the Death of the Beloved

Though we need to weep your loss,
You dwell in that safe place in our hearts,
Where no storm or night or pain can reach you
Let us not look for you only in memory,
Where we would grow lonely without you.
You would want us to find you in presence,
Beside us when beauty brightens,
When kindness glows
And music echoes eternal tones.

~ John O'Donohue

Walking Group for Grievers

A walking group for those who are grieving continues on Thursday afternoons from 3-4:30 p.m. during the month of April. We are going to a variety of Lehigh Valley locations and it is an easy walk in the company of others who are grieving. Masks are required. Come join us and get some fresh air and exercise to boost those endorphins! To register for one or all of the sessions, call Tara George at (484) 523-0833.

Beyond the First Year

It's a pretty well-accepted theory that the first year after a loved one dies is the hardest. We're offering a new workshop where we explore how expectations can set us up for disappointment after encountering a year of many firsts. More details to come!

Ongoing Grief Support

All in-person support groups and workshops are still on hold in compliance with CDC and Pennsylvania Department of Health guidelines. Here are some options we offer to you at this time:

Individual support: Three grief counselors provide support and information about grief via phone and video sessions. Contact information for all three 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 grief counselor and participants are invited to suggest topics for discussion.

One online group meets virtually on the 2nd Tuesday of each month (**April 13, 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 (**April 20, 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, 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.givinggriefavoice.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