



Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

July 2021

The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart. ~ Helen Keller

St. Luke's Hospice

484-526-2499

Bereavement Team:

Alexandra Becker, LSW
Bereavement Counselor
Alexandra.Becker@sluhn.org
(484) 635-0662

Jean Francis, MEd, CT
Bereavement Counselor
Jean.Francis@sluhn.org
(484) 225-9269

Dawn Cavanaugh
Family Services Administrative
Assistant
Dawn.Cavanaugh@sluhn.org
(484) 526-2499

Lorrette Ayers, LCSW, PhD
Family Services Manager
Lorrette.Ayers@sluhn.org
(631) 459-6257

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.

Before each job interview, Andrew slips on his father's gold watch. It's a weighty piece of jewelry, a reminder of his father's long and successful career and he feels more confident when wearing it. At holiday time, Mandy puts her mother's cut glass water decanter on the dinner table and is flooded with joyful memories of her mother's love and guidance as well as the wonderful meals she prepared for the family.

The watch and the decanter are linking objects, items belonging to deceased loved ones that provide a source of solace for both Andrew and Mandy. A linking object is literally any object or image that connects the griever in a comforting way with a loved one. Linking objects can be used to create a ritual of remembrance and continuity as well as a reminder of a needed behavior when establishing new routines. They are used to create powerful connections that can last for months or even years.

A common fear people often mention after a death is that treasured memories will begin to fade away. So when death is still new and raw, we tend to think that everything that was important to the deceased becomes important to us simply because it was important to him or her. We hold tight to every physical reminder—from toothbrushes to cashmere sweaters. But problems can arise when we accumulate too many possessions that take up too much space. Over time, this memory clutter can begin to impede our ability to feel a sense of peace and calm. That's when using a linking object can provide a bridge to memories.

The use of linking objects wasn't always widely recommended by grief experts because many falsely believed that these objects tended to encourage a pathological holding on to the deceased while neglecting the task of reinvesting in life. In reality, though, linking objects can be pivotal motivating factors in accepting the death of a loved one and beginning the new life without the physical presence of the deceased. These objects are one type of learning tool to bring empathy, understanding, and awareness of enduring love into the experience of massive change. Psychotherapist Thomas Moore put it another way when he wrote, "Grief is complete only with a shift in being, in the way you live, think, and relate to the world." You can emerge from your sorrow and sadness with new strength, compassion, and vision you never realized you possessed.

Creating Linking Objects

Are you interested in creating a linking object? Here are a few things to keep in mind when utilizing this important coping tool.

1. Pick any object that belonged to the deceased that has special meaning for you. It could be a key chain, coin, medal, photo, piece of clothing or jewelry. It could be something your loved one purchased for you or something you bought when you were with this person. Carry or wear this object when you long for comfort or connection.

2. Another type of linking object is to choose a word or saying that is descriptive of the character or essence of your loved one. Take it to a calligrapher and have it written so that it can be framed or reproduced. It can then be placed in various locations that are meaningful to you and used as an inspiration, tribute or reminder.

3. Call on your creativity to bring special meaning from a linking object. One woman took her husband's wedding band and hers to a jeweler where they were melted down and made into a new piece of jewelry that symbolized their enduring love. Look online to find symbolic meanings to various objects or colors. For example, the color green is symbolic of life and growth. Decide how you can weave the information you find into the choice of your linking object.

Linking objects are transitional items that assist the griever in maintaining a healthy bond of remembrance and thanksgiving, as one begins the journey to find new ways to reinvest emotional energy into life. While others may not see the significance, a linking object can have intimate meaning for the person who is grieving a loved one's death.



The Power of Talking

Many people have grown up in families where expressing strong emotion was discouraged. Maintaining the “stiff upper lip” was considered the best way to cope with loss.

Keeping feelings bottled inside can lead to physical symptoms. In fact, just the opposite is true: talking is healing. Talking enables the person who is grieving to locate the pain, bring it to the surface and release it. Because the pain of grief doesn't magically disappear, we need to talk about a particular feeling or memory again and again. In fact, it's been said that people who are grieving need to share their story of loss 50 to 100 times. The number isn't as important as the telling, that talking helps release pain and helps the griever make sense of the magnitude of their loss.

The key to talking through grief is finding people who will listen without offering advice or cheerful clichés. These are what we call healing people, H-E-A-L:

H is for Here—People who make time for you because they know their presence is one of the best gifts they can provide.

E is for Empathetic—While no one can truly know what you're feeling, people with empathy do their best to understand and let some of your pain touch them.

A is for Accepting— These people don't judge you, try to change you, or tell you what you should do or how you should think.

L is for Listening—They focus on what you have to say. They let you share your feelings, as raw as they may be, and know how important it is to tell your story again and again.

Source: Kenneth C. Haugk, *Finding Hope and Healing*

Grief Support for You

St. Luke's Hospice continues to abide by the CDC and Pennsylvania Department of Health guidelines for public gatherings during the pandemic. For this reason, all in-person support groups and workshops continue to be held virtually. Here are the support options we offer at this time:

Individual support: Our bereavement counselors provide support and information through in-person visits as well as 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 affects us emotionally, physically, spiritually and psychologically, coping strategies and ways to reconcile the loss. Pre-registration is required by contacting Jean Francis at (484) 225-9269. Workshop offerings include a daytime and an evening option each month:

Tuesday, July 13, 2021 (2-3:30 pm) and Thursday, July 29, 2021 (7-8:30 pm)

Monday, August 9, 2021 (2-3:30 pm) and Thursday, August 26, 2021 (7-8:30 pm)

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 the videos from the comfort of your home.

Times of Remembrance

As we begin to return to in-person gatherings, we are offering three outdoor Times of Remembrances this summer. These gatherings provide an opportunity to renew the connection between families and hospice staff. At each Time of Remembrance, we will remember and celebrate the lives of the people we served in our hospice program through reflective readings, the reading of each patient name, and a butterfly release. If you prefer that we **not** read your loved one's name, kindly let us know by calling (484) 526-2499.

Join the hospice staff for the **Stroudsburg Time of Remembrance at 11 a.m. on Saturday, July 24, 2021 at Chestnut Hill Township Park, 221 PA-715 in Brodheadsville, Pa 18322**. Rain date is Sunday, July 25 at the same time and location. Families and friends of patients who died on St. Luke's Hospice services between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021 are invited to attend.

Families and friends are invited to the **Lehighon Time of Remembrance on Saturday July 31, 2021 at 11 a.m. at Dinkey Memorial Lutheran Church, 1742 Dinkey Road, Lehighon, Pa. 18235**. Rain date is Sunday, August 1 at the same time and location. We will gather to commemorate patients who died between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021.

Join the hospice staff for the **Bethlehem Time of Remembrance on August 21, 2021 at 11 a.m. at Dimmick Park, 570 Durham St., Hellertown, Pa. 18055**. Rain date is August 22 at the same time and location. We will be reading the names of patients we have served through our Bethlehem office and Hospice House between March 1, 2021 and June 30, 2021.

Additional Places to Find Support and Share Your Story

Below is a list of free bereavement services in the area. Because of the ongoing pandemic and the need for physical distancing, some 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@gmail.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.