



Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

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“Loneliness is not an accident or a choice. It’s an uninvited and uncreated companion. It does you no good even though it’s like one of the elements in the world that you cannot exist without.”
~ by Fannie Howe

St. Luke's Hospice

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There are many aspects of bereavement that make loneliness seem inevitable and unsolvable. Most important is the fact that what you desire is your loved one and what you have is an emptiness molded so specifically to your loved one's likeness that no one else could ever fill it.

People who are grieving are at a disadvantage when it comes to loneliness because the person they long for is forever gone. Loneliness after the death of a loved one is many things. It's the ache of having loved someone so much that pieces of you became them and pieces of them became you. When they departed from this earth, a piece of your heart and your history went with them. You were left behind to live a life that feels incomplete.

Now that your loved one has died, there are parts of you that no longer make sense—the roles you both filled, the jokes and memories you shared, their part of simple routines you created together. What do you do with all these things now that your loved one is gone? If the common experience of feeling misunderstood and alienated in grief weren't enough, you have now lost one of the few people in this world who you feel truly “got” you. You may feel alone in a world full of a people. You may feel lonely.

The loneliness of grief is not easily solved. It takes time and effort. Hardest of all, it requires acceptance and patience. In order to lessen the loneliness, you have to find a way to accept what simply is and to find fulfillment in the reality that is available to you. You will never fill your loved one's void, that simply won't happen. Instead, you have to work slowly to fill in the abyss.

How do you do this? Each person will do this differently. When you are ready, open yourself up to the love of people in your life. You don't have to let go of your loved one, but simultaneously you begin to decide to accept the company and support of others and maybe, if necessary, seek out new people in the process. It won't be easy and it won't be perfect. But in time the hole left by your loved one will be filled by the love of many.

Strategies for Coping with Loneliness

Loneliness is typically defined as the discrepancy between a person's desired and actual social relationships. Although it's sometimes considered synonymous with social isolation, the two are distinct concepts. Social isolation reflects an objective measure of social interactions and relationships, whereas loneliness reflects perceived social isolation. Loneliness is more closely associated with the *quality of relationships* than the actual number of relationships that a person has.

Virtually everyone experiences loneliness from time to time, but it can feel especially intense after the death of a loved one. Although it's a common experience, people don't usually know what to do with these feelings. In addition to being emotionally painful, loneliness can increase depression, depress your immune system and increase physical pain. Research shows that the areas of the brain that deal with social exclusion are the same areas that process physical pain, adding a scientific explanation to the experience of a "broken heart." Below are five strategies for coping with loneliness:

Join a class or a club. Whether it's an art class, exercise class or a book club, joining something automatically exposes you to a group of people who share at least one of your interests. Check your local library or community college as well as city parks and recreation departments to see what's available. Joining a class or club can also provide a sense of belonging that comes with being part of a group. It gives you something to look forward to and can stimulate creativity.

Volunteer. Volunteering for a cause you or your loved one believed in can provide the same benefits as taking a class or joining a club: meeting others, being part of a group and creating new experiences. It also brings the benefit of altruism and can help you find more meaning in your life. In addition to decreasing loneliness, this can bring greater happiness and

and life satisfaction. Additionally, working with those who have less than you helps you feel a deeper sense of gratitude for what you have in your own life.

Strengthen existing relationships. You probably already have people in your life that you could get to know better or connections with family that could be deepened. If so, why not call friends more often, go out with them more, and find other ways to enjoy your existing relationships and strengthen bonds? If you're struggling to find the motivation to reach out to others, it might be helpful to start slowly. Come up with just one supportive friend or family member who you could imagine reaching out to. It's also reassuring to know that strong social support is beneficial for your mental health.

Talk to strangers. An easy way to find connections in everyday life is by interacting in small ways with acquaintances or strangers you encounter. In fact, research shows that doing so contributes to our social and emotional well-being. So next time you grab a cup of coffee or see your neighbor on a walk, strike up a conversation. You may find you feel happier afterward.

Adopt a pet. Pets, especially dogs and cats, offer so many benefits, and preventing loneliness is one of them. Rescuing a pet combines the benefits of altruism and companionship. It can connect you with other people—walking a dog opens you up to a community of other dog-walkers, and a cute dog on a leash tends to be a people magnet. Additionally, pets provide unconditional love, which is a great salve for loneliness.



News & Events

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. All in-person support groups and workshops continue to be held virtually. Please call our office at (484) 526-2499 to obtain the latest information about in-person grief support. Here are the options we currently offer:

Individual support: Our bereavement counselors provide support and information through in-person visits as well as video and telephone counseling sessions. Counselor 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 you emotionally, physically, spiritually and psychologically, coping strategies and ways to reconcile the loss. Call Jean Francis at (484) 225-9269 to receive an invitation to the workshop. Then download the Microsoft Teams app on your smart phone or computer. At the appointed time, click "join the meeting" button to connect with the group. Workshop offerings include a day-time and an evening option each month:

Monday, August 16, 2021 (2-3:30 pm) and
Thursday, August 26, 2021 (7-8:30 pm).

Wednesday, September 1, 2021 (2-3:30 p.m.)
and Wednesday, September 29, 2021 (7-8:30 p.m.)

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.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 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.

Time of Remembrance

With the return to in-person gatherings, we will be holding our next outdoor Time of Remembrance on Saturday, August 21, 2021 at 11 a.m. at Dimmick Park, 570 Durham Street, Hellertown, PA 18055. Rain date is August 22nd at the same time and location. We will be reading the names of patients we have served through our Bethlehem office and the Hospice House between March 1, 2021 and June 30, 2021.



Book Review

Being alone doesn't have to mean being lonely. Consider taking time to reflect, regroup and reconnect with the most important person in your life—you! *The Loneliness Companion: A Guide for Improving Your Self-Esteem and Finding Comfort in Yourself* can help you cope with feelings of alienation and isolation while finding comfort and community in our hyperconnected modern world. Author and psychotherapist Shrein H. Bahrami writes about how to boost self-confidence and build self-esteem. *The Loneliness Companion* delivers real, actionable exercises and evidence-based strategies so you can navigate loneliness and gain a healthier, positive approach to establishing new relationships.

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@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.