



Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

All grief needs to be blessed. In order to be blessed, it must be heard.

~ Dr. Lani Leary

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St. Luke's Hospice

484-526-2499

Bereavement Team:

Ana Salazar

Administrative Assistant

Ana.salazar@sluhn.org

(484) 526-2499

Alexandra Becker, LSW

Bereavement Counselor

Alexandra.Becker@sluhn.org

(484) 635-0662

Heather Myers, MEd, LPC

Bereavement Counselor

Heather.Myers@sluhn.org

(484) 653-7833

Katie Ruf, LCSW

Bereavement Counselor

Katie.Ruf@sluhn.org

(484) 225-9269

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Whether we admit it or not, most of us worry about something at some time in life. Common worries include concerns about money, family, relationships, health, work, safety and reaching personal goals. It can feel almost impossible to not feel the creep of anxiety and worry right now.

People who are grieving the loss of someone they loved usually have an additional layer of worries to contend with. These often include some or all of the following: How will I survive this loss? What will happen to me in the future? What will happen to my young children or elderly parents? I feel so different — am I going crazy? Will I feel like this forever?

To control some of these *normal* and *natural* worries, experts suggest addressing them proactively. The first step is to write out your worry. Put it down on paper. Putting a worry in writing helps you focus on what's *really* bothering you.

Next, find a time and a place to worry. This is about containment, establishing boundaries for worrying so we prevent troubling thoughts to occupy our lives 24/7. Choose a time, the same time each day, that you will “work” on your worries. Then choose a place where you will “be” with these worries. Maybe it's a room or a special chair in the house where you don't often spend time in. Don't choose your bedroom for your worry work, as this will interfere with your sleep.

Then at the allotted time and place, enlist your brain power and problem solving skills. For example, imagine what the worst possible outcome of a particular worry might be. Write down all of these outcomes. Then ask yourself, what is my estimate of how likely each of these events will occur? Again write down all possible outcomes, no matter how ridiculous some of them may seem. Then dig deeper and answer the following questions: What do I need to do about this worry? Who do I need to contact about this worry? What are the things I need to say to the person who is center of this worry? What is stopping me from taking care of this worry and what I can I do about it? The final step in this process is to write down how you will handle the worry and set a date when you will begin to take action.

We all worry, about legitimate and frivolous concerns. Grievers have an additional burden after a loss but they also have a choice to make.

To quote a Swedish proverb, “worry often gives a small thing a big shadow.” Make the choice today to create smaller shadows.

Worry Verse Anxiety

The terms worry and anxiety are often used interchangeably, but they *are* different psychological states.

Although both are associated with a generalized sense of discomfort, we experience them differently and both have implications for our emotional and psychological health. Here are a few differences between the two terms:

Worry is typically centered in the head with specific and identifiable thoughts. These thoughts may be lingering or fleeting. We may worry about getting to the airport on time and this worry creates concern.

Anxiety, on the other hand, is usually experienced within the body. It's more visceral in nature and our thinking tends to be more scattered. Instead of being concerned about travel to the airport, we may be anxious about traveling in general – in a car, on a cruise ship or in an airplane. It's a vague but persistent uneasiness, something we can't quite harness and for that reason the feeling keeps growing. Worry tends to be a temporary state while anxiety can and often persists.

Another key difference between these two terms is that worry is focused verbally while anxiety includes both verbal thoughts and mental images. It's these mental images that produce the greater cardiovascular response. In the above example of feeling anxious about traveling, we may visualize an aircraft that's skidded off the runway or one that has crash landed. Or we may envision a fiery car accident or a traffic jam. Or we may see the "lot full" sign at the parking garage or long lines at an airline check-in counter. On and on our thoughts race as we conjure up more images to feed our anxious frenzy.

If you tend to be a worrier, do know that most worrying also triggers problem solving activity. And that's a good thing. Untreated anxiety usually does not. So if we're worried about getting to the airport on time, we consider possible

solutions — researching the best routes, checking highway and weather conditions. On the other hand, anxiety is more like a hamster wheel that spins us around and around without leading to productive solutions. We worry about traveling — *all* modes of travel and *all* consequences of travel. This makes problem solving much more difficult. Consequently anxiety usually creates more severe discomfort and the fears and concerns we generate from this continuing verbal and visual process tend to be more unrealistic than the typical worrier may experience.



Say Yes to Affirmations

When consumed with worry or anxiety, it's not only hard to concentrate, it's also difficult to pinpoint what the worry or fear really is. That's where affirmations come in. An affirmation is a phrase you repeat to yourself to change a negative or fear-based belief. Affirmations also serve as a distraction and keep racing thoughts at bay.

Do you practice saying affirmations? It's one of the easiest ways to change negative self-talk. Here are a few of our favorite affirmations from **ThinkUp**, a free app you can download to your phone. Download it today and experience the benefits for yourself:

- ▶ At this moment, I choose to release the past and look forward to the good that awaits me.
- ▶ With each new breath, I inhale strength and exhale fear. I am learning that it is safe for me to heal and grow.
- ▶ At this moment, I choose to feel calm and peaceful. Everything is unfolding as it should.
- ▶ I choose to fill my mind with positive, nurturing, and healing thoughts.
- ▶ There are no mistakes, only lessons to be learned. I did the best I could.

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:

Thursday, February 10th 2022, 1-2:30PM

Wednesday, February 23rd 2022, 6-7:30PM

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.

Breathing Methods for Self Soothing

Breathing is a great way to achieve relaxation but can be hard to do when it feels like the weight of the world is sitting on your chest. Grief can feel like constant constriction and holding your breath, waiting for the next shoe to drop.

Breathing intentionally is a small way to release tension and to let your body and brain know that they can take a break from constantly feeling under threat. It's the quickest and cheapest way to take a moment for yourself.



4-7-8 Breathing

Sit in a chair with your back straight. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth and keep it there through the entire exercise. You will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue; try pursing your lips slightly if this seems awkward.

Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound. Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of **four**. Hold your breath for a count of **seven**. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of **eight**. This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

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.

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. 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.