

Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

June 2020

"We must meet the challenge rather than wish it were not before us."

William J. Brennan

It's often been said that the second year of grief is more challenging than the first year. Now isn't that a comforting thought! The truth is that the second or even the third year after the death of a loved one is *different* than when the death first happened. There are a number of reasons why this is true.

During the first year, we are numb. We can be in denial and may even pretend our loved one is just away on a trip. Then, too, there are the many distractions during that first year — an estate to settle, bills to pay, accounts to close and closets to empty. We may be preoccupied by having to find employment or make changes in living arrangements. We white knuckle through holidays as others step in and orchestrate how we will get through these emotional days. The first year can feel like some sort of test and after we've passed this test, we erroneously believe that things will return to normal, whatever that means. The first year is about survival. The second year is about endurance.

The "first year vs. second year" is one of those grief myths you're urged to ignore. It unknowingly affects our expectations about the future. More than thinking in terms of year one, year two or year three, ask yourself how you *honestly* think you are adjusting to the loss. That's the best measure to use.

Grief changes with time and as time marches on, we may need to confront some unhealthy coping strategies that no longer serve us. Perhaps we have relied too heavily on alcohol, pills or keeping super busy as ways to distract us from the pain of loss. Maybe we've been consumed by anger at our situation or at God so much so that we have repelled family and friends. Maybe we have become so wounded that we have created barriers between ourselves and other people. We may have even pretended that we will do everything as we have always done things as a way to cope with our loss. It's another form of denial that won't serve us very well in the long run.

Over time, grief feels different because the world has also moved on. The people who were by our side early on after the loss occurred have vanished. We long for our loved one's name to be spoken aloud by other people. Grief is an intense interior aloneness. Embrace your wounds, cherish your memories and remain open to the possibilities of hope and love in your life.

Jean

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Ignore These Common Grief Myths

Isn't it amazing how so many people become grief experts after you have experienced the death of a loved one! Even people who have both parents, have never been married or have never lost a loved one offer advice and tell us how we should feel after losing a child, partner or parent.

Outdated advice abounds. Here are some of myths that can negatively affect our expectations for the future:

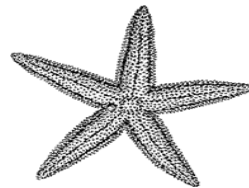
Grief is usually completed within a year's time. We live in a grief denying society and most people are uncomfortable with our sadness and grief. Hence they hold onto the well-known yet unproven myth that grief is neatly wrapped up in a year, stamped with the word "closure." This misguided myth fails to take into consideration different personalities, relationships, coping styles and social supports. The pain of grief does not end. Instead it softens and over time we will be comforted by some wonderful memories. There are no timelines for grief.

Things will eventually return to normal. Recognize that nothing will be the same because you are not the same, especially after having loved and then lost your loved one. In fact, you are quite possibly a better version of yourself after experiencing their death. You have certainly learned more about the fragility of life and consequently you may be a more understanding, appreciative, loving and compassionate person than you were before.

We grieve losses the same way. Imagine you and a friend undergo knee replacement surgery. Will your experiences in the hospital and rehab be the same? Of course not. You are different people with unique physical and emotional characteristics as well as different pain thresholds. The same is true with grief. Don't compare yourself to the co-worker who returns to work

with a smile three days after her father died while you choke up watching *Father of the Bride* reruns. Before you judge yourself harshly, keep in mind that two people grieving the loss of the *same* person grieve the loss differently. What may trigger you may be a non-event for someone else.

I know what you're going through, I lost my mother, too. In grief work, we talk about primary and secondary losses. A primary loss is the death of the person while secondary losses are all the subsequent losses the death creates. One daughter longs for her mother's sage advice and meatloaf recipe while another daughter misses her mother's gruff no-nonsense approach to life. How can anyone know all the mini losses we will experience in the months and years to come? The bottom line is that they really can't.



The Sea Star

When a sea star loses one of its rays, it has the ability to grow back or regenerate.

Notice that one ray always shows a line through it. This line is to acknowledge the pain of our loss and that we have been changed forever. It is also a reminder that the people we love will always be remembered and will always be a part of our lives.

Our sea star, however, will always be shown whole, with all of its rays intact. We believe that this symbolizes another tremendously important message, the belief that grief can transcend into a journey of healing.

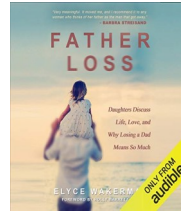
Celebrating Father's Day

Perhaps this is the first Father's Day without Dad or the person who had been a father figure in your life. Perhaps your relationship with your father was not all that you wished it could have been. Or perhaps you're concerned about how your children are coping now that their father is dead.

Make a plan if this is going to be an emotionally difficult day for you. With physical distancing, try one of the various apps such as Facetime or Zoom to connect with family and friends. Here are five ways to mark Father's Day and still feel joy:

- Prepare a meal and serve your father's favorite foods. Set an extra place at the table and offer a toast to him.
- Buy a Father's Day card and write him a message of gratitude for all that he did for you. If your relationship with Dad was rocky, write him a letter and telling him what you needed or hoped your relationship might have been like.
- Share stories that your father told you and stories *about* him.
- Spend time or have a conversation with someone your father admired. You could even present that person with a Father's Day card.
- Do an activity that you enjoyed with him.

My father loved to play tennis and was my first tennis teacher. When we got together for holidays, it was more important for my siblings and me to bring tennis racquets than side dishes to his house. The tennis courts are currently closed this year, but I'll practice my backhand on the garage wall, relive the good memories, and prepare myself for a possible "grief ambush."



Father Loss

As Elyce Wakerman found in the scores of interviews she conducted, the loss of a father through death, divorce, or abandonment is the event that shapes a girl's life and all her future relationships. "In my fantasy," one woman commented, my father "remains the perfect man" — a difficult role for any other man to fill.

Based partly on the author's experience, in-depth interviews and a questionnaire she developed to which almost 600 women responded, *Father Loss* provides the clearest portrait yet of a very special group of women. As a group, they express their insecurities. Yet individually, many have become outstanding achievers, including Eleanor Roosevelt, Helen Gurney Brown, Barbara Streisand, Gloria Steinem, Geraldine Ferraro and many others.

A best seller when it was first published 25 years ago and now updated and revised, *Father Loss* gives information and insight to fatherless daughters, to widows and divorcees with daughters, and to every father who needs to understand the vital role he plays in his daughter's life - as the first man she ever loves.

Stay Tuned

The Butterfly Releases planned for our Stroudsburg and Lehighton offices, and the Time of Remembrance for our Bethlehem office and Hospice House have all been postponed. Look for updates in the coming weeks.

Additional Places to Find Support and Share Your Story

Below is a list of free bereavement services in the area. Because of physical distancing, many of these resources can only be accessed online. Please contact our bereavement department at 484-526-2499 if you are in need of additional resources.

Adult Support Information

Bradbury Sullivan LGBT Community Center at 522 W. Maple Street, Allentown 18101 offers a professionally led monthly bereavement support group for LGBT people who have experienced loss. The group meets on the 4th Tuesday of each month from 5:30-7:00 pm. Please register with Ariel@bradburysullivancenter.org.

The Compassionate Friends offers ongoing support groups for parents, grandparents and adult siblings grieving the loss of a child, grandchild or sibling. Visit their website at www.thecompassionatefriends.org or contact these local chapters: Lehigh Valley chapter (484-891-0823), Carbon County chapter (484-719-6753), Easton chapter (call Bailey Benner at 610-515-3526) and Quakertown chapter (484-408-7314).

Doylestown Hospital Hospice offers a variety of support groups and programs that change seasonally. Visit www.dhospice.com or call 215-345-2079.

Gentle Yoga for Grief, Stress and Life Transitions is offered by Wendy Littner Thompson, M.Ed., LPC, RYT. Please contact her at 610-730-1992 or visit her website at www.givinggriefavoice.com to learn more. Please be sure to let her know if your loved one was a St. Luke's Hospice patient.

Grief Share is a faith-based grief support group program offered at many locations in the Lehigh Valley. There is a Grief Share program on Sundays from 2:30-4:30 p.m. at the Mt. Eaton Church in Saylorsburg, 18353. Call (570) 992-7050 for additional information. For other Grief Share locations throughout the area, visit their web site — www.griefshare.org — and enter your zip code to find the location of a group near you.

Grand View Hospital Hospice offers many groups and services that change seasonally. Please call 215-453-4210 for more information.

GRASP is for families whom have experienced death due to substance abuse. The daytime support group meets at the First Presbyterian Church in Allentown, room 118 on the first Monday of the month at 12 noon. Please register with Jenny Kemps at 610-422-8490 or email jenkemps@ptd.net. The evening support group meets on the third Monday of the month from 7-8:30 pm. Please register with Nancy Howe at 484-788-9440 or email nancyhowe@ymail.com.

HALOS – CLC (Hope After a Loved One's Suicide – Child Loss Chapter) is for parents, grandparents and adult siblings who have experienced loss of a child or sibling to suicide. The group meets on the 4th Thursday of the month from 6:30– 8:30 pm at Hughes Library in Stroudsburg, PA. Call to register with Alice Keyes at 570-236-1168 or email at alicekeys00@gmail.com.

Lehigh Valley Health Network offers many groups and services that change seasonally. Please call 610-402-7481 for more information.

Lehigh Valley Home Care & Hospice Pocono's bereavement support group meets on the first and third Wednesdays of the month from 12 noon-1 p.m. Anyone who has experienced the death of a loved one is invited to attend. The support group meets at 502 VNA Road, Route 447, East Stroudsburg, PA 18301. Please call Tammy Hiestand at 272-762-3826 to learn more.

Suicide: The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has excellent information on risk factors, statistics, education and local services. Visit their web site at www.afsp.org and enter your zip code to find the chapter nearest you. All chapters are run by people who have experienced the suicide of a loved one.

Support Information for Children

Lehigh Valley Health Network offers “Stepping Stones for Children” for ages 6 through 17. This is a combination of education, activities and support to help facilitate healthy grieving with others who are the same age. Please call 610-402-7481 to register. The group meets at 2024 Lehigh Street, Allentown, PA 18103.

Support Information in New Jersey

Karen Ann Quinlan Hospice 800-882-1117 www.karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement