

Comfort for the Grieving Heart

St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program 484-526-2499

September 2026

The Grieving Brain

Often when you think of grief, you think about the emotional pain of losing someone you love. But, if you have ever forgotten why you walked into a room, lost your train of thought, struggled to concentrate, misremembered someone's name, or felt mentally exhausted or disoriented in your grief – you have experienced the grieving brain.

When you are grieving, it can feel like your brain has suddenly been put into slow motion. Think of your brain like a well-maintained highway. Normally, traffic flows smoothly across every lane. You are able to navigate thoughts, plans, memories, appointments, and daily decisions with relative ease. However, when someone you love dies a massive roadblock happens on that highway. To keep you safe, your brain naturally closes most of the lanes. This is done with purpose. Your brain is diverting most of the traffic towards managing the blow of the loss, keeping you grounded, and trying to preserve energy. With only a single lane open for everyday thinking, the traffic of normal life backs up rather quickly and that is why even the simplest of decisions and tasks can leave you at a standstill. Small choices cause a bottleneck, conversations take longer to process, and details may be missed or forgotten.

Our brains are also designed to form deep connections with those we love. Over time, our loved ones become intertwined with our daily routines, expectations, and feelings of love and safety. We know their voice, touch, schedules, and expect them to be with us. In death, the brain does not immediately understand that they are gone. Our brains are driven by habit and memory, and it now has to adjust to a new reality that no longer matches what it has known for years. Your brain is a highway under reconstruction. You did not ask to be diverted. You did not ask for the traffic or road rage, but here it is.

While all this reconstruction is going on, grief is activating your body's stress response system. As the lanes are being rebuilt, emergency warning systems are activated. Flashing lights, warnings of lanes merging or narrowing, and reduced speed limit signs are all flashing while your GPS just keeps clamoring on, *recalculating, recalculating, recalculating...* These elevated stress hormones also interfere with concentration, memory, sleep, and emotional regulation.

With time, as reconstruction continues, one detour at a time is removed, newly formed lanes open, and traffic starts to run with a bit more ease. The highway certainly does not look as you remembered and your loss remains part of the landscape, but it will not always bring traffic to a near halt. This highway is wide enough to carry both the memory of your loved one and the road still ahead.

For more information about the services offered by the St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program or if you would like to be added or removed from our mailing list, please contact us at 484-526-2499. Newsletters are also available electronically by calling our office or online at www.sluhn.org (search - Hospice grief)

How to Care for Your Grieving Brain

1. Lighten Your Mental Load: Free up precious mental energy by relying on external supports instead of memory alone.

- **Write everything down.** Keep a notebook nearby, use a planner or calendar, set reminders on your phone, and make simple daily to-do lists.
- **Create visual cues.** Leave your medication beside your coffee mug or place your keys in the same bowl every time you come home.
- **Simplify daily decisions.** Wear comfortable, familiar clothing and repeat easy meals when possible. Streamlining small decisions helps conserve mental energy.

2. Calm Your Nervous System: Grief often keeps your body in a heightened state of stress. Gentle practices can help signal safety and promote calm.

- **Spend a few minutes in morning sunlight.** Just 5–10 minutes of natural light can help regulate your body's internal clock, supporting better sleep and improved daytime focus.
- **Practice the long exhale.** Breathe in normally, then exhale a little longer than you inhaled. This simple technique tells your nervous system to shift out of survival mode.
- **Reduce sensory overload.** Turn off background noise, dim bright lights in the evening, and take breaks from news or social media when your mind feels overwhelmed.

3. Nourish Your Brain: Supporting your physical health also supports your brain.

- **Stay hydrated.** Even mild dehydration can worsen fatigue, headaches, and the ability to focus. Keep a bottle or glass of water nearby as a reminder.
- **Eat regularly.** Loss of appetite is common during grief, but your brain still needs nourishment. If full meals feel overwhelming, choose smaller meals or healthy snacks throughout the day.
- **Take micro-rests.** If restful sleep is difficult, allow yourself 10-minute quiet breaks during the day. Lie down, close your eyes, and simply rest without expecting to fall asleep.

4. Keep a Simple, Consistent Routine: Predictability gives your brain a sense of stability.

- Try to keep regular times for:

Waking up

Eating meals

Taking medications

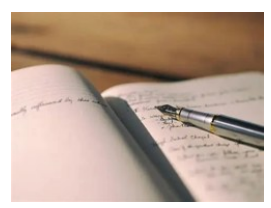
Going to bed

Prioritize sleep whenever possible. Although grief often disrupts sleep, it is one of the most important ways your brain restores itself. Aim for a consistent bedtime, limit screen time before bed, and create a calming evening routine.

5. Care for Your Whole Self: Healing involves more than your brain—it includes caring for your body, your emotions, and your relationships.

- **Move your body gently.** A short walk, stretching, gardening, or simply spending time outdoors can improve mood, reduce stress, and increase mental clarity.
- **Accept help when it's offered, and ask for it when you need it.**
- **Celebrate small victories.** Every small step forward matters.

6. Give Yourself Grace: Healing is not a race. Some days will feel easier than others, and that's part of the grieving process. Instead of asking, "**What's wrong with me?**" try asking, "**What do I need today?**"



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Our Monthly Support Groups

Our bereavement support groups are facilitated by one of our grief counselors. We provide a safe and collaborative space to process your grief journey. **For more information, call 484-526-2499.**



NEW! IMPORTANT—PRE-REGISTRATION WILL BE REQUIRED FOR ALL SUPPORT GROUPS. PLEASE CALL 484-526-2499 TO REGISTER. Groups will be held when 3 or more are registered.

Lehigh Valley Area Support Groups

Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church 323 Nazareth Pike, Bethlehem 18020 **10-11:30am: 9/4, 10/2**

Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church 323 Nazareth Pike, Bethlehem 18020 **6:30-8pm: 9/8, 10/13**

Brodheadsville Area Support Group

Western Pocono Comm. Library, 131 Pilgrim Way, Brodheadsville 18322 **1-2:30pm: 9/16, 10/14**

Carbon/Schuylkill Area Support Group

St. Luke's Lehighton Campus, 211 N. 12th Street, Lehighton PA 18235 **1-2:30pm: 9/9, 10/7**

Sellersville Area Support Group

Zwingli UCC Church, 350 Wile Ave, Souderton PA 18964 **1-2:30pm: 9/14, 10/12**

INTRODUCING “Walking with Grief” Walking Support Group: Physical activity is a powerful tool in the healing process. The simple practice of walking has been shown to be a healthy outlet for working through difficult emotions. If you are looking for a different outlet to grieve, come join us for our new **Walking with Grief Support Group**. Sometimes we don't just want to talk about it, we want to walk about it. Facilitated by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Team.

Location: Anderson Campus 1872 St. Luke's Blvd, Easton, PA 18045 (Meet at Gazebo near Cancer Center)

Time: 12:00pm - 1:30pm

Dates: Tuesday 9/15; Tuesday 10/13

****This is an outdoor program, dress for the weather. Wear comfortable walking shoes. Bring a water bottle.****

Good Grief Workshops

A 90-minute virtual workshop offered monthly to provide you with an introduction to grief. It is informational, interactive, and a good starting point before our in-person support groups.

Registration is required and the program is recommended for those 4-6 weeks out from their loss. For more information, call 484-526-2499.

Join us from 1-2:30pm: Sept. 10; Oct. 8

Join us from 6-7:30pm: Sept. 23; Oct. 28

St. Luke's Senior Meals

St. Luke's University Health Network offers healthy, affordable meals for seniors. It's a great opportunity for a meal for less than \$5 and to enjoy meeting new people. Scan the QR code and select **Older Adult Meal Program** for location, days and times.



Other Places to Find Support

We encourage you to call the number on the back of your insurance card to find resources paid by your individual insurance plan. Find an individual therapist at psychologytoday.com

Community Bereavement Resources

Bradbury Sullivan LGBT Community Center offers bereavement support for LGBT people who have experienced loss. Visit bradburysullivancenter.org or email at reilly@bradburysullivancenter.org.

Cancer Support Community of the Greater Lehigh Valley provides professional programs of emotional support and education. Visit cancersupportglv.org.

The Compassionate Friends offers ongoing support for parents, grandparents, and adult siblings grieving the loss of a child, grandchild, or sibling. Visit 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 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 givinggriefavoice.com or call 610-730-1992. Be sure to indicate if your loved one was a St. Luke's Hospice patient.

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.

Grief Share is a faith-based support group offered throughout the Lehigh Valley. Visit griefshare.org and enter your zip code to find the contact person and program near you.

Lehigh Valley Health Network offers many groups and services for adults and children between the ages of 6-17. Call 610-402-7481. For information about program offerings in the Pocono area, call 272-762-3826 or email Bryson.Boes@lvhn.org.

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.). Visit oasisbethlehem.org, call 484-747-6825 or email at rhonda@oasisbethlehem.org.

Suicide Loss. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has excellent information on risk factors, statistics, and education about suicide. Visit 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 karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement.

With time, support, and gentle self-care, healing will come. Trust that your mind knows how to mend, even if that feels distant right now. Give yourself rest and grace, and remember that progress is measured not by speed, but by taking one day, one moment, and one small step at a time.

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