



# Comfort for the Grieving Heart

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Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

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*The most important thing is to try and inspire people so that they can be great in whatever they want to do.*  
~ Kolbe Bryant

**St. Luke's Hospice**

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When news broke that basketball legend Kobe Bryant and his daughter Gianna had been killed in a helicopter crash, people throughout the country were devastated. Memorials spontaneously cropped up outside the Staples Center in Los Angeles and the Empire state building lit up in Lakers colors.

Grieving the death of a celebrity is quite common, yet it brings up complicated emotions. People may feel guilt or shame and wonder if there's something wrong with them for feeling devastated about someone they didn't actually know. Maybe you've been fortunate to have met one or two celebrities in your life, but you somehow feel connected to many more than that. Actors, musicians, politicians and athletes mean a lot to us over time as we watch or see them on a multitude of social platforms. So when a celebrity dies, we experience real feelings of loss and often these feelings are similar to the way we feel when we lose a friend or family member. These people became part of our lives in some way, even if it's only a passive connection.

We tend to have respect for public figures that we admire and this constitutes a positive connection. We also come to identify with aspects of who they are beyond their profession. Kobe Bryant had a strong relationship with his daughters, so if you are or were close to your father, you may be particularly hard hit by his death. This fosters a sense of empathy and identification with the celebrity despite never having met him or her.

The important point to keep in mind, especially if you're feeling guilty or weird about how sad you are, is that grieving the death of a famous person is not at all abnormal. We may relate and identify with aspects of who they are and are consequently able to imagine how we might feel if it was our child who lost a father. For more information about how the deaths of famous people can affect us, please turn to page 2.

**PLEASE NOTE:** If you would like to be added or removed from our mailing list, or if you would prefer to receive an electronic copy, please contact Dawn at 484-526-2499.

### Grieving a Celebrity

It's not surprising that so many people feel emptiness after a celebrity dies. Yet these feelings may actually be beneficial. Here's why:

**They heighten our sense of understanding for those who are suffering.** The death of a public figure may be the first time we hear of a particular disease or illness. Some high visible deaths remind us of the randomness that occurs, such as Christopher Reeve's wife, Dana, who died from lung cancer yet never smoked.

**Our feelings may provide clues as to what's missing from our lives.** Few of us have kept company with Michael Jackson, David Bowie or Whitney Houston, but news of their deaths may have transported us back to another place and time. Music triggers memories and these moments of bittersweet nostalgia may be opportunities to assess what's working in our lives. By going back in time, we may identify what is important to us and to find ways to reintroduce some long lost passions, goals and dreams into our adult lives.

**Collective mourning connects us to a larger community.** Attending a candlelight vigil or weighing in on a Facebook commentary connects us with others. Collective mourning reminds us that we're part of a particular generation and enables us to celebrate the cultural touchstones that define us.

**Most important, celebrity deaths remind us that everyone dies.** Neither fame, wealth nor talent shields us from that inevitability. Recognizing life's finiteness encourages us to pursue healthy and mindful lives and to appreciate what we have before it's gone.

### Containing Celebrity Grief

If you find yourself deeply affected by the death of a public figure, stop watching news coverage. Endless recaps of the person's life and death only heightens distress. Focus instead on positive things such as nature, friends and pets to increase optimism.

The celebrity's impact on your life is still with you even after they're gone. You can revisit good memories by reading their books, listening to their music or watching shows they were in. Collecting and holding onto some of their memorabilia allows you to maintain the connection they had in you.

Devote some time to mourning. Everyone processes grief differently. Give yourself permission and time to mourn. It may even be helpful to connect with other fans to share feelings and obtain support.

Be aware that sometimes your reaction to a famous person's death may be related to the death of someone close to you. Celebrity deaths can trigger unfinished business relating to the deaths in our own lives. We are a death denying society so the grief you felt when your loved one died may not have been socially supported at that time.

Maintain regular routines. Patterns provide a sense of security and comfort when you are upset.

Seek help if the grief continues to overwhelm you. Be aware of how long it's taking to move through grief. If you're struggling, you may benefit from talking with a counselor who specializes in grief. This is especially important if you're having trouble sleeping, eating and functioning in your daily life.

### 6-Week Grief Group Beginning

This general grief group is open to anyone who is experiencing the loss of a parent, sibling, friend, spouse or other significant relationship. In this group, you'll have the opportunity to process your thoughts and feelings as you learn how to cope and redefine who you are now. We will provide information to help you understand grief and loss.

The group will be held on six Mondays beginning May 11th from 5:30-7:30 pm at St. Luke's Hospital - Allentown Campus, 1736 Hamilton Street, Allentown, 18104. Meeting dates are May 11, 18, June 8, 15, 22, and 29. Do note we skip the Mondays between May 18<sup>th</sup> and June 8<sup>th</sup>. If interested, please commit to attending all six sessions. To register, call Tara George at (484) 526-2314.



### Stress Relief

Stress is an unfortunate reality when confronting the death of a loved one as we learn to adjust to a life that looks nothing like it used to. Here are a few constructive ways to cultivate positive coping:

- Ask for help and be willing to accept help
- Learn to say 'no'
- Avoid people who stress you out
- Spend time with animals
- Express yourself out loud or on paper
- Practice gratitude
- Count to ten when overwhelmed or angry
- Take deep breaths
- Talk to someone
- Get enough sleep and eat well
- Do something you enjoy every day
- Do yoga or meditate
- Make realistic to-do lists
- Congratulate yourself for progress you make
- Laugh

### Drop-In Groups

Drop-In Groups enable you the chance to receive and provide support in a collaborative environment. They are for people who have experienced all different types of losses—the death of a parent, spouse, friend, sibling, etc. Groups are facilitated by a grief counselor and participants are invited to suggest topics for discussion. No registration is needed, hence the name “drop-in.” You are invited to meet others and explore the challenges often faced after the death of a loved one. Here are the locations for our current drop-in groups:

**Easton: First Monday of every month from 4-5:30 pm** at St. Luke's Anderson Hospital Campus, 1872 St. Luke's Blvd, Easton, 18045. Meeting are held in the medical office building, lower level conference room A. For more information, contact Tara George at (484) 526-2314.

**Quakertown: Second Monday of every month from 6-7:30 pm** at St. Luke's Quakertown Hospital Campus, 1021 Park Avenue, Quakertown, 18951 in the cafeteria conference room (lower level of the hospital). For more information, contact Jean Francis (484) 526-2514.

**Brodheadsville: Third Tuesday of the month from 1:30-3 pm** at the Western Pocono Community Library, 131 Pilgrim Way, Brodheadsville 18322. For directions or more information, contact Jean Francis at (484) 526-2514.

**Lehighton: Third Tuesday of the month from 1:30-3 pm.** We are once again trying to start an open group in this area and will meet in the afternoon. Location to be announced. For more information, contact Tara George (484) 526-2314.

## Additional Places to Find Support and Share Your Story

This is a list of free bereavement services in the area. Please call the bereavement office at 484-526-2499 if you are in need of something more or for referrals to other services.

### **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](mailto: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](http://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](http://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.givinggriefavoic.com](http://www.givinggriefavoic.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](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://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](http://www.karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement)