



Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

March 2021

"No matter how long the winter is, spring is sure to follow." ~ Proverbs

St. Luke's Hospice

484-526-2499

Grief Support Team:

Alexandra Becker, L.S.W.
Grief Counselor
Alexandra.Becker@sluhn.org
(484) 635-0662

Jean Francis, M.Ed., C.T.
Grief Counselor
Jean.Francis@sluhn.org
(484) 225-9269

Tara George, M.A.
Grief Counselor
Tara.George@sluhn.org
(484) 523-0833

Dawn Cavanaugh
Family Services Administrative Assistant
Dawn.Cavanaugh@sluhn.org
(484) 526-2499

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With the first day of spring on March 20th, grievors may find themselves experiencing a wide range of emotions. Spring is a rebirth. For some, spring is a welcome sight after a long cold winter. The first robins make an appearance. The days get warmer and daylight lasts longer. There are signs of new life everywhere from the birth of babies in the animal kingdom, trees beginning to bud, and the first signs of flowers emerging from the ground. Many are breathing a sigh of relief with the new spring air.

Yet, the passage of seasons is a passage of time. In grief, we often think about the last time that we saw our loved ones. A marker of time, like the changes of seasons, can be difficult because it represents how long we have been separated from our loved one. It can also be difficult if spring was your loved one's favorite season. It is not uncommon to feel guilty because we are enjoying something and our loved one is physically not here to experience the same.

We can also experience spring as a rebirth of ourselves in embracing self-care. Grief is hard work and spring can be a wonderful time to take care of ourselves and nurture our souls. When we are grieving our bodies might feel as though we have been hit by a truck. Grief can truly initiate physiological symptoms that mimic what we experience when we have the flu. Our bodies often feel run down, we may experience headaches and stomachaches, and we may feel achy and tired all of the time. Exercise is known to help alleviate those symptoms and it boosts our body's natural immunity to help ward off illnesses when our body is down for the count. You might choose to exercise in the company of others, which may help us feel less alone at a time when we feel like we might not fit in with or belong to the rest of the world. Exercise is a tangible way to feel accomplished and to help improve our focus when our brains are anything but focused. And, we know that exercise releases natural endorphins, which are chemicals in our body that may make us feel incrementally better. For those having trouble with sleep, exercise might help us sleep better, too. Did you know that even the act of getting out in the sun has been known to boost our immunity, decrease feelings of depression, help our sleep, and reduce stress?

In this issue, we will highlight a couple of activities that we can do in the spring to help take care of ourselves. In grief, we may feel as though all we want to do is cocoon and stay in the safety of own homes and bed. There is definitely time for that, too. Yet if you give yourself a little push or a big one, you might find that getting out in the sun and exercising might help to make you feel slightly better, even if it is for the short-term. We'll take it!

Tara George

10-Minute Walking Meditation*

1. As you begin, walk at a natural pace. Place your hands wherever comfortable.

▶ If useful, you can count steps up to 10 and then start back at one again.

▶ With each step, pay attention to the lifting and falling of your foot. Notice movement in your legs and the rest of your body. Notice any shifting of your body from side to side.

▶ Whatever else captures your attention, come back to the sensation of walking. Your mind will wander, so without frustration, guide it back again as many times as you need.

▶ Particularly outdoors, maintain a larger sense of the environment around you, taking it all in, staying safe and aware.

2. Now for a few minutes, expand your attention to sounds. Whether you're indoors, in the woods, or in a city, pay attention to sounds without labeling or naming, or getting caught up in whether you find them pleasant or unpleasant.

3. Shift your awareness to your sense of smell. Again, simply notice. Don't push or force yourself to feel anything at all, just bring attention to the sense of smell, whatever you discover.

4. Now move to vision — colors and objects and whatever else you see. Patiently coming back each time something grabs your attention, or even if something needs addressing, like avoiding an obstacle.

5. Keep this open awareness of everything around you, wherever you are. Nothing to do, nothing to fix, nothing to change. Fully aware, and walking.

6. In the last moments, come back to awareness of the physical sensations of walking, wherever else your mind found itself throughout the practice. Notice your feet again touching the ground. Notice again the movements in your body with each step.

7. When you're ready to end your walking meditation, pause and stand still for a moment again. Then consider how you might bring this kind of awareness into the rest of your day.

**From www.mindful.com*



The Sitting Sun Meditation*

This meditation can be done in the comfort of your own backyard, a park, or any other outdoor location. Find a sunny spot, a place that is comfortable with sunlight exposure. Don't forget the sunscreen. A good option is to find a place with a mixture of shade and sun if it is a particularly hot day.

1. Taking your seat. Whatever you're sitting on—be it a chair, a meditation cushion, or a park bench—find a spot that gives you stable and solid support.

2. Bringing attention to the body. Noticing the body, having an open and receptive stance to any sensations that are present. If there are none, knowing that this is OK and just being with the experience of not noticing sensations.

3. Attending to sunlight sensations. Bringing attention to any sensations from the sunlight on the body. Noticing qualities of these sensations such as temperature, tingling, pressure... whatever it is in that very moment. Acknowledging the air quality from its contact with the body such as dryness, humidity, a breeze. Also, feeling out where the sun is in the sky, based on the sun rays on the body. You do not have to think about where it is in the sky, but just sensing it moment-to-moment. If you do find that you are in thought, noticing this, and gently coming back to the sensations of sunlight.

4. Expanding to sensations of sound. With an outdoor meditation, there is the likelihood of sounds of the street, wildlife, plants, crowds, whooshing... opening your ears to the soundscape. You do not have to go out searching for sounds, just observing them as they come and go.

5. Offering gratitude to the sun. The sun is something that we often take for granted. Taking a moment to be grateful for its presence and what it does for us every day. Bringing life to the earth by nourishing the plants, animals and ourselves.

** From the Centre for Mindfulness Studies*

Grief Support for You

All in-person support groups and workshops are still on hold in compliance with CDC and Pennsylvania state guidelines. Here are the support options we offer at this time:

Individual support: Grief counselors are available for phone and video sessions to support you. Contact information for the three counselors is on the front page of this newsletter.

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 during these tender times. To view them, 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 onto grief support. About halfway down this page, click onto the video library heading "Want to understand your grief?" Answer the question about your connection with St. Luke's Hospice (if any). Then view videos from the comfort of your home.

Virtual Support Groups: These groups enable participants the chance to receive and provide support in a collaborative environment. They are facilitated by a grief counselor and participants are invited to suggest topics for discussion.

Our first online open group meets virtually on the 2nd Tuesday of each month (**March 9**) from 4-5:30 p.m. Please contact Tara George at (484) 523-0833 and she will show you how to connect using the Microsoft Teams platform.

Our second online open group meets virtually on the third Tuesday of the month (**March 16**) from 1:30-3 pm and all are welcome to join. For more information on how to connect using the Microsoft Teams platform, contact Alexandra Becker at (484)-635-0662.

8-Week Mindfulness Group

We're offering a mindfulness based stress reduction group for grievers that will meet virtually for eight Friday afternoons from 3-4:30 p.m. beginning March 5th. Participants will practice and utilize various strategies to reduce anxiety and stress from the loss of a loved. To register, call Alexandra Becker at (484) 635-0662.

Walking Group for Grievers

A walking group for those who are grieving is being offered on eight Thursday afternoons from 3-4:30 p.m. beginning March 11th. We'll be going to a variety of Lehigh Valley locations to enjoy an easy walk. Masks are required. Please consider joining us as we take in the sun, get some exercise and are in the company of others going through similar experiences. To register, call Tara George at (484) 523-0833.

Spouse/Partner Loss Group

The spouse-partner union is a relationship of choice. When we experience the death of a loved one we have chosen to share life with, we may experience a painful process of reorganization while facing loneliness, fear and having to navigate new roles in the household. During this six-week group, participants will explore the unique relationship with the person who died, coping techniques to reconcile the loss and courage to begin anew. We meet virtually on six consecutive Thursday nights from 7-9 p.m. beginning March 25, April 1,8,15,22 and April 29. To register, contact Jean Francis at (484) 225-9269.

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 physical distancing, many resources may only be offered virtually. 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, visit www.bradburysullivancenter.org or contact Reilly 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.givinggriefavoice.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.

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, contact Bryson Boes at 272-762-3826 or 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.). 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. Contact Nancy Howe at nancyhowe@gmail.com or 484-788-9440 or Tim Howe at howet60@yahoo.com or (646-401-4455).

Suicide Loss: The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has excellent information on risk factors, statistics, 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