



# Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

September 2021

*"The risk of love is loss and the price of loss is grief. But the pain of grief is only a shadow when compared with the pain of never risking love."*

~ by Hilary Stanton Zunin

## St. Luke's Hospice

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Albert came for a counseling session a few months after the death of his teenage son. He was troubled by people who had been hinting that he should be acting differently after his son's death. His wife asked him why he didn't cry like she did when they talked about their son. His co-workers voiced concern that he appeared very distracted at work. His sister thought the best thing he should do now is to spend more time playing golf.

"What's the right way to grieve?" Albert asked.

Maybe you've asked yourself this same question. The answer is not that complicated. Your way is the right way to grieve.

The truth is that there is no prescribed method for grieving. We are unique individuals who bring life experiences, relationships, culture, faith and/or philosophical beliefs to the grief work table. Two people within the same family will grieve the death of the same family member differently; that's because each had a unique relationship with the person who died.

For just a moment, think about the experience of grief as a physical ailment, for oftentimes grief can manifest itself in physical sensations and symptoms. Imagine that you are heading down a flight of stairs when suddenly catastrophe happens — you trip and fall. Your ankle is swollen and your back is throbbing. Do you let others persuade you that your pain isn't really that bad? Do you let others convince you that you probably don't need to get an x-ray? Of course not. But for countless reasons, grievers often allow others to tell them how they should think, feel and behave. No one can possibly understand what's going on for us — except us!

For some, grief feels like an emotional roller coaster, with feelings of sadness, loneliness, anger, regret, fear and other emotions spinning us in unpredictable twists and turns. Others may experience grief in more physical ways as we feel the urge to take action and do— to make phone calls, to clean out closets and other tasks as a way to funnel our feelings. Death may cause us to question our faith or belief in a higher power or in the fairness of our situation. Some may respond with tears, others with rage, while still others are numb.

There are, however, a few wrong ways to grieve—ways that suggest it's time to seek professional help. For some, grief can create tremendous anxiety or depression that can be disabling, rendering us unable to function in even the most

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basic aspects of life. We may ignore personal health and safety, failing to take medications as prescribed or driving recklessly. Some people may even contemplate suicide. These behaviors suggest the need to consult a mental health professional to learn what avenues of support are available to you as well as better methods of coping with grief.

We need to take ownership of our grief, to understand ways we are experiencing and expressing our feelings and to seek useful approaches for adapting to our loss. For some, this may mean joining a support group, reading self-help books about loss, journaling our thoughts and feelings and seeking out others who have experienced similar losses. It can be insightful to examine our own “loss history” and find patterns of coping that we once relied on. It can also be helpful to examine the ways we dealt with other losses in our life. What helped us when we encountered earlier losses? What was not helpful? Who were the people who were able to companion us in our pain?

Grieving is about oscillating, immersing ourselves with emotions and then taking breaks, to reconnect with healthy supports. It is about growing and learning and, along the way, making mistakes. Perhaps you discovered that it was too soon to join a support group or write a blog about your loss. That’s good information you will use on your grief journey.

None of this is to suggest that we entirely ignore comments or observations from others. Sometimes those closest to us may see things we might not realize about ourselves. But we also need to start trusting our feelings and instincts and recognize that you will become an expert on your grief. We need to grieve our way.

## Delayed Grief

Sometimes grief takes awhile to truly settle in. This is known as delayed grief, grief that you don’t fully experience until weeks, months or even years after the loss. Those who experience a delayed grief reaction often describe it as a devastating sadness that hits them out of the blue.

There are several reasons why this happens. Sometimes the shock of a loss can be too overwhelming to cope with at the time, so you may put off working through your grief until later. It’s not unusual for people to set grief aside as they deal with practical problems such as arranging child care, moving or securing employment. If you’re the primary caregiver or the one who holds the family together, it can be hard to find time to properly grieve. Another factor contributing to delayed grief is having something significant to deal with immediately after the loss. A divorce, injury, pregnancy or major work event—all of these reasons and others may delay the grieving process.

When delayed grief does catch up with us, it’s sometimes triggered by another loss or by something small and otherwise inconsequential. Once it arrives, this delayed grief reaction is, in a way, to be welcomed. After all, it grants us the opportunity to work through our feelings and to begin to heal. If you’re holding off on fully feeling your grief, you might find that it manifests in a different way. Headaches, irritability, aches and pains, anxiousness, mood swings, or feeling numb and apathetic are all typical symptoms. If you are concerned that you might not be coping well, it’s important to reach out for help.

### Grief Support for You

St. Luke's Hospice continues to abide by the CDC and Pennsylvania Department of Health guidelines for public gatherings during the pandemic. All in-person support groups and workshops continue to be held virtually. Please call (484) 526-2499 to obtain the latest information about in-person grief support. Here are the options we currently offer:

**Individual support:** Our bereavement counselors provide support and information through in-person visits as well as video and telephone counseling sessions. Counselor 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 affects you emotionally, physically, spiritually and psychologically, coping strategies and ways to reconcile the loss. Call any of the counselors to receive an invitation to the workshop. Then download the Microsoft Teams app on your smart phone or computer. At the appointed time, click "join the meeting" button to connect with the group. Workshop offerings include a daytime and an evening option each month:

**Wednesday, September 1, 2021 (2-3:30 p.m.) and  
Wednesday, September 29, 2021 (7-8:30 p.m.)**

**Monday, October 11, 2021 (2-3:30 p.m.) and  
Wednesday, October 27, 2021 (7-8:30 p.m.)**

**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.slhn.org/vna> and click on the hospice heading. On the left side of the screen under the VNA heading, click onto 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.

### There Will Come a Day

There will come a day  
When your tears of sorrow  
Will softly flow into tears of remembrance  
And your heart will begin to heal itself  
And grieving will be interrupted by episodes of joy  
And you will hear the whisper of hope.

There will come a day  
When you will welcome the tears of remembrance  
As a sun shower of the soul  
A turning of the tide  
A promise of peace.

There will come a day  
When you will risk loving  
Go on believing  
And treasure the tears of remembering.

Author unknown



## *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](http://www.bradburysullivancenter.org) or email at [reilly@bradburysullivancenter.org](mailto: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](http://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](http://www.doylestownhealth.org/hospital/services/bereavement) or call 215-345-2079.

**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](http://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](http://www.oasisbethlehem.org), call 484-747-6825 or email at [rhonda@oasisbethlehem.org](mailto: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@gmail.com](mailto:nancyhowe@gmail.com) or 484-788-9440 or Tim Howe at [howet60@yahoo.com](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://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](http://www.karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement).