



Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

December 2023

"I'm unwrapping all these memories. Fighting back the tears. It's just a different kind of Christmas this year."

~Mark Schultz

St. Luke's Hospice

Bereavement Team:

484-526-2499

PLEASE NOTE:

If you would like to be added or removed from our mailing list or prefer to receive an electronic copy, please contact us at 484-526-2499.

It's here! The hap-happiest time of the year! Time to put up the lights, decorate the tree, break out the Kinara, and dust off the Menorah. Make sure you get presents for everyone from your next door neighbor to Uncle Eddie. Don't forget to handwrite all of those Holiday cards! Oooh, and you better run to the store before all the ham, turkey, brisket, chicken and sweet potatoes are sold out. You've made your list, right? Go... Go.. .Go... We've got traditions to keep, people!



For many of you, this holiday season is going to be unlike any before. Even if you are hoping to keep traditions the same, it is going to be different, because a staple of your celebration, your life, is not physically here. We draw comfort from the familiar and thereby, our traditions. However, some of you may not feel like celebrating at all this year. That's okay. Some of you may not feel like celebrating, but have little ones asking you to put up the tree and handing you their list of what they hope to get for the holidays. So, for their sake, you do your best keep up appearances... Which is absolutely exhausting! No matter what the holidays look like for you this year, there is going to be sadness and stress, but hopefully, sprinkled in, you will find some moments of joy, laughter and peace.

In this edition of *Comfort for the Grieving Heart*, we wanted to take the opportunity to highlight some ideas for getting through the holidays. Many of these ideas focus on you and your needs, this time of year. It is not selfish when you are grieving to tell others what you think you can handle and in what ways they can help or support you. It truly is self-care and self-love. The stress of the holidays hits us all, but the emotions that come along with grieving and the holidays can bring us to our knees. Keep those you can talk to and who genuinely care, close to you. It's important to keep your loved one part of the holidays, too!

Pump the brakes, don't be afraid to sound the horn and proceed slowly.



Helpful Hints

Helping Yourself During the Holidays

- * **Avoid the *Would's* and *Should's***
- * **Set Limits**
 - * Eliminate Unnecessary Stress
 - * Lower Your Expectations
 - * Don't Spread Yourself Too Thin
- * **Express Your Feelings**
 - * Be with Supportive and Comforting People
 - * Share with Them
- * **Ask for What You Need**
 - * Allow Others to Help
 - * Delegate Tasks
- * **Be Tolerant of Your Needs**
 - * Avoid Isolation - Accept invitations. Know it is okay to change your mind or leave early.
 - * Plan ahead to help alleviate anxiety.
- * **Holiday Traditions**
 - * Same: It will never be the same, but you can try to keep it as close to it as possible.
 - * New: Try something completely different. Perhaps get away for the holiday or volunteer.
 - * Change: New host, new location, change of table placement... Whatever might work!
- * **Cards**
 - * Send or Don't Send - Either is okay!
 - * Simpler Idea- Email/Send a holiday letter.
- * **Gift Giving Ideas**
 - * No Gifts or Gift Cards
 - * Make a donation to a cause close to your loved one's heart.
 - * Give yourself a gift you know your loved one would have given you.

Activities to Keep Your Loved One Part of the Holidays

Give yourself and others permission to keep your loved one part of the holidays. Encourage others to share and remember. Here are some ideas...

- * **Memory Table** - Set aside a space to place memories of your loved one.
 - Photo -A gift they gave you
 - Their favorite candy, record, book...
- * **Memory Basket** - Place a basket or box near the door with paper and pens. As people arrive, ask them to write a memory of the holiday or of your loved one. At some point, pass the basket and have everyone pick a memory from the basket to share. Let the kids share, too.
- * **Toast** - At dinner make a toast to those who have passed and encourage others to do the same.
- * **Craft for the Kids (and Big Kids)** - Craft stores carry bulbs, picture frames, ornaments, bookmarks, etc. that little ones and big kids alike can decorate and color. These can be nice activities to take part in and can be made in honor of your loved one.
- * **Light a Candle** - Have a candle placed and lit in their honor.
- * **Keep Their Place at the Table** - Leave a spot at the table for them. They always hold a place in your heart.

Grief Support for You

St. Luke's Hospice abides by CDC and Pennsylvania Department of Health guidelines for public gatherings during these challenging times. Here are support options we currently offer:

Individual support: Our bereavement counselors provide support and information through video and telephone counseling sessions. 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 may affect you emotionally, physically, spiritually and psychologically, coping strategies and ways to reconcile the loss. For more information and to receive an invitation to join the meeting, call (484) 526-2499. You will be asked to download the Microsoft Teams app on your smart phone or computer. Workshop offerings include a daytime and an evening option each month:

Thursday, December 7th 2023, 1-2:30PM

Wednesday, December 20th 2023, 6-7:30PM

Thursday, January 11th 2024, 1-2:30PM

Wednesday, January 24th 2024, 6-7:30PM

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

Monthly Support Group

Brodheads ville

The Brodheads ville group meets the third Monday of the month from 10:00 -11:30 am at the Western Pocono Community Library, 131 Pilgrim Way, Brodheads ville, 18322.

It provides space for participants to receive and provide support in a collaborative environment. It is facilitated by a grief counselor.

For more information, contact Alexandra at (484) 635-0662 and if the weather looks threatening, call (484) 526-2514 and listen for an update on this phone line.

Virtual

A new virtual group will begin meeting in November. It will be via Microsoft Teams the first Friday of every month from 10:00-11:30 am.

This group will provide a space for therapeutic and supportive conversation to process grief. Topics will vary based on attendance. It is facilitated by a grief counselor. For more information, contact Katie Ruf at (484) 225-9269 .

Will Light Candles This Christmas

I will light candles this Christmas,
Candles of joy despite all the sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
Candles of courage for fears ever present,
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,
Candles of love to inspire all my living,
Candles that will burn all year long.

~ Howard Thurman

Additional Places to Find Support and Share Your Story

Below is a list of free bereavement services in the area. 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 or email 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.givinggriefavoic.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.

OASIS Community Center offers a variety of support groups to those grieving a loss due to substance related causes. Therapist-led *Hopeful Hearts* 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 occasionally offered in-person. For dates and times, visit www.oasisbethlehem.org or call 484-747-6825. Advanced registration is required, please email 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@ymail.com or 484-788-9440 or Tim Howe at 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.

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

Cancer Support Community of the Greater Lehigh Valley cancersupportglv.org

Find an individual therapist at: **Psychologytoday.com**

We encourage you to call the **number on the back of your insurance card** to find resources paid by your individual insurance plan.

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.