Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

March 2019

Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow, it only saps today of its joy.

- Leo F. Buscaglia

Whether we admit it or not, most of us worry about something at some time in life. Common worries include concerns about money, family, relationships, health, work, safety and reaching personal goals.

People who are grieving the loss of someone they loved usually have an additional layer of worries to contend with. These often include some or all of the following: How will I survive this loss? What will happen to me in the future? What will happen to my young children or elderly parents? I feel so different — am I going crazy? Will I feel like this forever?

To control some of these normal and natural worries, experts suggest addressing them proactively. The first step is to write out your worry. Put it down on paper. Putting a worry in writing helps you focus on what’s really bothering you.

Next, find a time and a place to worry. This is about containment, establishing boundaries for worrying so we prevent troubling thoughts to occupy our lives 24/7. Choose a time, the same time each day, that you will “work” on your worries. Then choose a place where you will “be” with these worries. Maybe it’s a room or a special chair in the house where you don’t often spend time in. Don’t choose your bedroom for your worry work, as this will interfere with your sleep.

Then at the allotted time and place, enlist your brain power and problem solving skills. For example, imagine what the worst possible outcome of a particular worry might be. Write down all of these outcomes. Then ask yourself, what is my estimate of how likely each of these events will occur? Again write down all possible outcomes, no matter how ridiculous some of them may seem. Then dig deeper and answer the following questions: What do I need to do about this worry? Who do I need to contact about this worry? What are the things I need to say to the person who is center of this worry? What is stopping me from taking care of this worry and what I can I do about it? The final step in this process is to write down how you will handle the worry and set a date when you will begin to take action.

We all worry, about legitimate and frivolous concerns. Grievers have an additional burden after a loss but they also have a choice to make. To quote a Swedish proverb, “worry often gives a small thing a big shadow.” Make the choice today to create smaller shadows.

Jean
Worry vs. Anxiety

The terms worry and anxiety are often used interchangeably, but they are different psychological states. Although both are associated with a generalized sense of discomfort, we experience them differently and both have implications for our emotional and psychological health. Here are a few differences between the two terms:

Worry is typically centered in the head with specific and identifiable thoughts. These thoughts may be lingering or fleeting. We may worry about getting to the airport on time and this worry creates concern.

Anxiety, on the other hand, is usually experienced within the body. It’s more visceral in nature and our thinking tends to be more scattered. Instead of being concerned about travel to the airport, we may be anxious about traveling in general – in a car, on a cruise ship or in an airplane. It’s a vague but persistent uneasiness, something we can’t quite harness and for that reason the feeling keeps growing. Worry tends to be a temporary state while anxiety can and often persists.

Another key difference between these two terms is that worry is focused verbally while anxiety includes both verbal thoughts and mental images. It’s these mental images that produce the greater cardiovascular response. In the above example of feeling anxious about traveling, we may visualize an aircraft that’s skidded off the runway or one that has crash landed. Or we may envision a fiery car accident or a traffic jam. Or we may see the “lot full” sign at the parking garage or long lines at an airline check-in counter. On and on our thoughts race as we conjure up more images to feed our anxious frenzy.

If you tend to be a worrier, do know that most worrying also triggers problem solving activity. And that’s a good thing. Untreated anxiety usually does not. So if we’re worried about getting to the airport on time, we consider possible solutions — researching the best routes, checking highway and weather conditions. On the other hand, anxiety is more like a hamster wheel that spins us around and around without leading to productive solutions. We worry about traveling — all modes of travel and all consequences of travel. This makes problem solving much more difficult. Consequently anxiety usually creates more severe discomfort and the fears and concerns we generate from this continuing verbal and visual process tend to be more unrealistic that the typical worrier may experience.

Say Yes to Affirmations

When consumed with worry or anxiety, it’s not only hard to concentrate, it’s also difficult to pinpoint what the worry or fear really is. That’s where affirmations come in. An affirmation is a phrase you repeat to yourself to change a negative or fear-based belief. Affirmations also serve as a distraction and keep racing thoughts at bay.

Do you practice saying affirmations? It’s one of the easiest ways to change negative self-talk. Here are a few of our favorite affirmations from ThinkUp, a free app you can download to your phone. Download it today and experience the benefits for yourself:

► At this moment, I choose to release the past and look forward to the good that awaits me.
► With each new breath, I inhale strength and exhale fear. I am learning that it is safe for me to heal and grow.
► At this moment, I choose to feel calm and peaceful. Everything is unfolding as it should.
► I choose to fill my mind with positive, nurturing, and healing thoughts.
► There are no mistakes, only lessons to be learned. I did the best I could.

Resources
Time of Remembrance

We invite you to join us for a Time of Remembrance of your loved ones, our hospice patients. We offer these Times of Remembrance throughout the year, and while they are conducted in houses of worship, they are not meant to be religious in nature. Instead, they offer us the opportunity to hold onto the value of each life and to bear witness to the legacies of each one, as we read each person’s name in a reflective setting, framed by words and music. If you would like to bring a photo of your loved one to share on our Photo Memorial Table, please do.

The next Time of Remembrance will be held on Sunday, March 31 at 3 p.m. at Wesley United Methodist Church, 2540 Center Street in Bethlehem, PA 18015. The names of the patients who died between November 1, 2018 through February 28, 2019 will be read aloud and invitations will be mailed to families. If you would prefer that your loved one’s name not be read, please let us know by calling 484-499. We look forward to seeing you.

4-7-8 Breathing

Breathing is a great way to achieve relaxation. Sit in a chair with your back straight. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth and keep it there through the entire exercise. You will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue; try pursing your lips slightly if this seems awkward.

Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound. Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four. Hold your breath for a count of seven. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight. This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

Open/Drop-In Support Groups

Open/Drop-In Support Groups offer continued support to grievers who have attended grief and loss programs through St. Luke’s Hospice. These groups enable participants the opportunity to receive and provide support in a collaborative environment. Groups are facilitated by a bereavement counselor but are directed by group members in terms of topics for discussion. Currently we offer two such groups:

Easton: First Monday of every month from 4-5 pm at St. Luke’s Hospital-Anderson Campus, Medical Office Building, 1700 St. Luke’s Blvd, Easton, 18045 in the lower level conference room A.

Quakertown: Second Monday of every month from 6-7 pm at St. Luke’s Hospital-Quakertown Campus, 1021 Park Avenue, Quakertown, 18951 in the cafeteria conference room.

Good Grief Workshops

Feelings and thoughts can be intense after the death of someone we loved. Why does that certain song make you feel sad? Why are you reduced to tears when you spy the jar of wheat germ at the grocery store?

This is why we offer Good Grief Workshops (formerly known as the Newly Bereaved Workshops). These workshops help participants understand the emotional, social, physical and spiritual impact of loss while learning to develop skills and strategies for coping.

The next workshop will be offered on Wednesday, March 27 from 6-8 pm at St. Luke’s Hospital-Monroe Campus, 100 St. Luke’s Lane, Stroudsburg—18630 in the lower level conference room A. To register, please call (484) 526-2499.
Additional Places to Find Support and to 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** – The center offers a professionally led monthly bereavement support group for LGBT people who have experienced loss. The group meets on the 4th Wednesday of each month from 5:30-7:00 pm. Please register with 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 or contact these local chapters: Allentown chapter (call Dawn De Long at 610-837-7924), Easton chapter (call John Sabo at 610-866-5468), Lehighton chapter (call Patty Bisel at 610-826-2938) and Quakertown chapter (484-408-7314).

**Doylestown Hospital Hospice** offers a variety of support groups. Visit 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.givinggriefavoice.com to learn more. Let her know if your loved one was a St. Luke’s Hospice patient.

**Good Grief Support Group** meets on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays of each month at 7 p.m. at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Fish Hill Road in Tannersville. Call (570) 629-1992 for more information.

**Grief Share** is a faith-based grief support group program. Several locations are provided within the Lehigh Valley. Visit www.griefshare.org to find a location 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 1st 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. 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.

**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.

**Lehigh Valley Health Network** offers many groups and services that change seasonally. Please call 215-453-4210 for more information.

**Monroe County VNA Hospice Bereavement Support Group** meets on the first and third Wednesdays of the month at 12 noon-1:30 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 570-421-5390 to learn more.

**Pocono VNA** offers a Good Grief Support Group for those who have experienced the death of a loved one. These groups are held on 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of the month at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Fish Hill Rd., Tannersville, PA 18372. The group begins at 7:00 pm. Call 570-629-1992 for more information.

**Virtual Grief Support** is offered by Dr. Don Eisenhauer. Don has a background in counseling and pastoral ministry and runs monthly tele-grief groups and chat room support. Participants either dial in via phone or log in via computer to share with other grievers. For more information about the dates and times of these opportunities, contact Don at onlinegriefcommunity@gmail.com.

**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