Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke’s Hospice Bereavement Program

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I know that if we meditate on a dream sufficiently long and thoroughly, if we carry it around with us and turn it over and over, something almost always comes of it.
- C.G. Jung

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It’s quite common for people who are grieving the death of a loved one to dream about the person who has died. These dreams run the gamut, from an ordinary kind of dream to one that is distressing or even nightmarish. Dreams may comfort or confound us.

Throughout recorded history, people have attached importance to dreams, seeing them as either messages from the divine or predictions of the future. Modern science has studied sleep and dreams for decades and many scientists believe that dreams are important – not so much as messages from the beyond but as expressions of what is going on in our minds.

Surveys in the United States report that about 60 percent of women and 40 percent of men report having dreamed about deceased loved ones. Often these dreams provide clues as to where a griever may be stuck in the grief and mourning process. One way to respond to dreams of deceased loved ones or other losses is to work with your dreams on your own. Beware of various books or “guides” you may find on the internet or in supermarket checkout lines. Anyone who tells you certain images in dreams “always” mean the same thing – like dreaming about water always means you’re going to take a trip – will probably be wrong. Dreams and their interpretations are as individual and unique as each person who has them.

A good way to start working with your dreams is to record them in a journal. Keep a notebook and pen or even a small tape recorder by your bed to help you recall and record dreams. You will remember more details if you write down what you dreamed when you awaken. Then as you begin to develop a body of recorded dreams, you may begin to see connections between dreams and your waking life. People who work with their dreams often say that such work has reassured them that death and loss has not severed a relationship. It has made the relationship stronger.

Jean

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.
Dream On

Not everyone dreams of deceased loved one or about other losses they’ve experienced. Just because you don’t dream about a loss doesn’t mean that there’s something wrong with you. Just remember if you do dream, the dream you encounter is only important to you and can only be interpreted by you. Consider these points as you assign meaning to your dreams:

1. The person who died does not have to appear in your dream in order for the dream to be relevant to the mourning process. If your loved one does appear in a dream, pay attention to their appearance. Do they look healthy? Do they appear as you remember them or are they much younger or older? Pay attention to any activity that they might be engaged in.

2. Don’t overlook dream fragments. Sometimes you may simply catch a glimpse of your loved one in a dream. “What was Mom doing at the elementary school cafeteria?” Dream fragments are much like putting pieces of a puzzle together.

3. If you experience recurrent dreams, look for underlying themes. Often the same theme underlies each dream although the metaphors and images within a dream may vary.

4. It’s quite common for griever to have dreams on or around the anniversary of the death of their loved one. This can be especially true for people who have not regularly dreamed of the deceased. Anniversaries other than their death such as a wedding anniversary, a birthday or any of the many other life transitions such as moving to a new house may also trigger such dreams.

6-Week Group Starting in June

Our next six-week general loss group starts on June 6th and will run for six Thursday evenings (June 6, 13, 20, 27, July 18 and July 25) from 6-8 p.m at Dinkey Memorial Church, 1742 Dinkey Road, Lehighton, 18212. Please note there are no meetings on July 4th and 11th. We hope more of our bereaved clients who live north of the Allentown-Bethlehem area will be able to attend.

General loss groups provide the opportunity to be with others who have experienced the loss of a loved one. Participants learn about themselves and about the person who has died. Since this is a general grief group, people who have experienced the death of a spouse, sibling, parent, friend or other significant relationship are invited to attend. We do ask if you register for the group that you commit to attending all six sessions. Do register early as these groups tend to fill up quickly. For more information or to sign up for this general loss group, please contact Tara George at (484) 526-2314.
**Children Attending Funerals**

**Question:** My six-year-old grandson was very close to my husband, his pop-pop, who just died. We are having a memorial service next month and can’t decide whether my grandson should attend. His parents are undecided. What do you think?

**Answer:** This is such a good question and it’s one we are asked all the time. Most young children are aware of death, even if they don’t fully grasp its significance and permanence. Death is a common theme in cartoons and television shows and a child of six may have already had some experience with the death of a beloved pet or relative. But experiencing grief firsthand is a different and often confusing process for kids. As a parent or grandparent, you can’t protect a child from the pain of loss, but you can help him feel safe. And by allowing and encouraging him to express his feelings, you can help him build healthy coping skills that will serve him well in the future.

Whether or not to attend the funeral or memorial service is a personal decision that depends on you and on the child. Funerals, memorial services and celebrations of life can be helpful for providing closure, but some children simply aren’t ready for such an intense experience.

Never force a child to attend such a service. If the child wants to go, make sure that you prepare him or her for what they will see and hear. Explain that these events are often sad occasions and some people will probably be crying. If a casket or urn will be present, you should prepare the child for that as well.

It’s also important to have an exit strategy if the child becomes upset and feels the need to leave. It’s best to have someone who can stay beside the child during the funeral to monitor how they are coping with the situation and to answer their questions.

**Open/Drop-In Support Groups**

Open/Drop-In Support 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 and each group meets for 90 minutes:

**Easton:** First Monday of every month from 4-5:30 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 6-7:30 pm at St. Luke’s Hospital-Quakertown Campus, 1021 Park Avenue, Quakertown, 18951 in the cafeteria conference room.

We trust that beyond the absence, there is a presence.

That beyond the pain, there can be healing.

That beyond the anger, there may be peace.

That beyond the hurting, there may be forgiveness.

That beyond the silence, there may be the word.

That beyond the word, there may be understanding,

That through understanding, there is love.

Gates of Prayer
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.

**Grief Share** is a faith-based grief support group program. 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 the web site www.griefshare.org and enter your zip code to learn 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 Kems at 610-422-8490 or email jenkems@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.

**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.

**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