Grief presents us with new demands and decisions. In addition to increasing stress levels, it also wreaks havoc on our ability to concentrate. While most people can rattle off a long list of tasks to accomplish following the death of their loved one, the one item that’s often missing from these lists is self care.

If you’ve been in a caregiving role for awhile — for weeks, months or even years — it’s hard to remember to put yourself first now or even what caring for yourself really means. Yet self care when you are grieving will reduce suffering in mind, body and spirit. Here are four simple things you can do for yourself today:

**Be gentle with yourself.** Grief is painful enough without personal judgment. There is only one person who is capable of offering you comfort 24/7 and that person is you. While self-compassion is not a cultural norm, it should be. Treating yourself as you would treat a beloved friend is tremendously healing. Give yourself the space to feel the pain of grief but then also give yourself permission to take breaks from your grief. When we are able to acknowledge that we’re not perfect, we can move away from blame, anger and guilt to acceptance and self compassion.

**Breathe mindfully.** Breathing fully and attending to each inhale and exhale accomplishes two things. First, it turns off the stress response known as fight-flight-freeze. Second, it focuses your mind only on the present, which can stimulate a sense of calm and well-being. Take several breaks throughout the day. Close your eyes and take three long breaths, focusing only on creating a slow cleansing inhale following by a long releasing exhale. Spend a few minutes throughout the day focusing only on your breath.

**Get a check-up.** If you’ve been caring for someone who has been ill for any length of time, you’ve probably postponed doctor appointments and routine testing. When you are grieving, your risk for illness increases. While grief is a natural reaction to loss, it’s not an illness itself. This is a good time to check in with your healthcare professional to attend to any pre-existing health conditions that stress could have negatively impacted such as blood pressure, cholesterol levels and changes in weight.

**Get rest.** Our entire belief system changes when we are thrown into grief. You may feel normal one minute and then chaos the next. Often after a loss, you actually have to work harder to get restful sleep. This means developing new bedtime routines. If you’re experiencing insomnia, learn more about good sleep hygiene habits. And if you’re sleeping more than you did before the loss, know that rest may be exactly what you need.

**Take care of yourself.**

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*There is no grief like the grief that does not speak.*

- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
Passed and Present

The book, Passed and Present by Allyson Gilbert is a one-of-a-kind guide for discovering creative and meaningful ways to keep the memory of loved ones alive. Inspiring and imaginative, this bona fide "how-to" manual teaches readers how to remember those we miss most, no matter how long they’ve been gone.

Passed and Present is not about sadness — it’s about remembering. It’s possible to look forward to living a rich and joyful life while keeping the memory of loved ones alive. This much-needed, easy-to-use roadmap shares 85 imaginative ways to celebrate and honor family and friends we never want to forget. Some topics include:

**Repurpose With Purpose:** Ideas for transforming objects, heirlooms and virtually any inherited item into a lasting memento.

**Not Just Holidays:** Tips for remembering any time of year when you feel that pull — be it a loved one’s birthday, an anniversary or just a moment when a memory catches you by surprise.

**Monthly Guide:** Christmas, Thanksgiving, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day and other special times of year present unique challenges and opportunities. This section provides exciting ideas for making the most of these times of the year while keeping your loved one’s memory alive.

**Places to Go:** Commemorative Travel is about finding destinations to reflect and honor loved ones. This section includes suggestions for incorporating aspects of these traditions into practices at home.

Being proactive about remembering loved ones has a powerful and unexpected benefit: it can make you happier.

Butterfly Launch

The butterfly is a symbol of life and transformation. Butterflies are often used to honor the journey that hospice patients take when leaving this world. Please join us for the second annual butterfly release on Sunday, July 15th at Dinkey Memorial Lutheran Church beginning at 11:30 am. Rain date will be the following Sunday, July 22nd. The church is located at 1742 Dinkey Road in Lehighton (Ashfield) -18212. The event includes an activity for children, the butterfly release and a picnic lunch afterwards. This event is free, but registration is required. Please call (484) 526-2499 to register.

Healing Rhythms

People who have experienced the death of a loved one are under a great deal of stress. Their world has been turned upside-down as future hopes and dreams have been shattered.

That’s why we offer Healing Rhythms, an evidence-based drumming group that promotes well-being and socialization as well as a non-strenuous workout. It’s a unique way to cope with grief in which the drum is the vehicle to express thoughts and feelings. Research indicates that drumming accelerates physical healing, boosts the immune system, releases emotional trauma and produces feelings of well-being. A drumming group also provides connection to others who are grieving.

Our drumming group is led by Remo HealthRhythms endorsed facilitator Maureen “Moe” Jerant. The next group will meet on six consecutive Saturday mornings from 10am to 12pm beginning June 9th through July 14th at the Lehigh Valley Friends Meetinghouse, 4116 Bath Pike (Route 512), Bethlehem - 18017. Please call 484-526-2499 to register for this event.
Newly Bereaved Workshops

No one teaches us how to handle the intense thoughts and feelings after the death of someone we loved. Our first teachers were probably family members, some who may have been too immersed in their own grief to help us navigate the emotional terrain of loss.

That’s why we offer the Newly Bereaved Workshops. They’re designed to help participants understand the emotional, physical, social and spiritual impact of loss. Due to popular demand, we’re offering more of these workshops in more locations throughout the Lehigh Valley.

The Newly Bereaved Workshops are designed for those who have experienced the death of a loved one within the past 1-3 months and each session will help participants learn grief reactions and coping strategies while honoring the uniqueness of their grief journey. Preregistration is required. Please call (484) 526-2499 to register.

Here is a list of the upcoming workshop times and locations:

**Monday, June 18 from 6-8 pm** at St Luke’s Hospital-Monroe Campus, 100 St Luke’s Lane, Stroudsburg – 18630 in the lower level conference room B.

**Monday, June 25 from 5-7 pm** at the Priscilla Payne Hurd Education Center, St Luke’s Hospital-Bethlehem Campus, 801 Ostrum Street, Bethlehem – 18015 in Room 102.

**Wednesday, July 18th from 6-8 pm** at Dinkey Evangelical Lutheran Memorial Church, 1742 Dinkey Road, Lehighton – 18212.

**Monday, July 23rd from 5-7 pm** at St Luke’s Allentown Campus, 1736 Hamilton Street, Allentown – 18104 in the Wieand conference room on the 3rd floor of the east wing.

Thursday, August 23rd from 6-8 pm at St Luke’s Hospital-Monroe Campus, 100 St Luke’s Lane, Stroudsburg -18630 in conference room B (lower level).

Monday, August 27th from 5-7 pm at the Priscilla Payne Hurd Education Center, St Luke’s Hospital-Bethlehem Campus, 801 Ostrum Street, Bethlehem - 18015 in Room 102.

Open/Drop-in Support Groups

Open/Drop-In Support Groups are designed to offer continued support to bereaved individuals who have already attended grief and loss programs through St Luke’s Hospice. Drop-In/Support Groups afford participants the chance to continue with supportive services. Groups are facilitated by a bereavement counselor but are directed by group members in terms of content and discussion.

We are no longer offering the Open/Drop-In Support Groups in Bethlehem and Lehighton. We do offer the following Open/Drop-In 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 (note earlier start time)** at St. Luke’s Hospital-Quakertown Campus, 1021 Park Avenue, Quakertown, 18951 in the cafeteria conference room.
Additional Places to Find Support and 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 that is not on this list or for referrals to other services.

**Adult**

**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.

**Doylestown Hospital Hospice** offers a variety of support groups, including a widow/widower group, a young survivors group and an adult loss group. Visit www.dhospice.com or call Celia Blum at 215-345-2079 for more information.

**Gentle Yoga for grief, stress and life transitions** – offered by Wendy Littner Thompson, M.Ed., LPC, RYT. Wendy is a psychotherapist specializing in grief counseling. She works privately with individuals, couples, families and also facilitates group therapy focused on grief psycho-education, therapeutic yoga practices for the integration of grief, stress, and life transitions, coping with anxiety and depression and cultivating self-esteem. Wendy offers many group sessions: Monday evenings from 6:00-7:30 PM, Tuesday afternoons from 2:00-3:30 PM and Thursdays from 11:00 AM-12:30 pm. Group size is limited to ten. Group members should bring a yoga mat. Please contact 610-730-1992 for location and more information or visit www.givinggriefavoice.com.

**Grief Share** are faith-based grief support groups provided throughout 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 who have experienced a death due to substance abuse. The support group meets at the 1st Presbyterian Church in Allentown, room 118. One group meets on the 1st Monday of the month at 12:00 PM. Please register with Jenny Kemps at 610-422-8490 or email jenkemps@ptd.net. Another group meets on the 3rd Monday of the month from 7:00–8:30 PM. Please register with Nancy Howe at 484-788-9440 or email nancyhowe@gmail.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.

**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 for more information or contact them at 484-597-0240 for the Lehigh Valley Chapter, 267-380-0130 for the Quakertown Chapter, and the Easton Chapter at 610-866-5468.

**VNA Hospice of Monroe County** offers an adult support group to anyone who has experienced the death of a loved one within the past 12 months. The group is held on the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month from 12:00 PM–1:30 PM at 502 VNA Road, Route 447, East Stroudsburg, PA 18301. Please contact 570-421-5390 for more information.

**Pocono VNA** offers a grief support group for those who have experienced the death of a loved one within the past 12 months. These groups are held on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday 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.

**Children**

**Lehigh Valley Health Network**

**Stepping Stones for Children:** This special group is a combination of education, art and activities designed to facilitate healthy grieving with others the same age who understand what they are going through. Please call 610-402-7481 to register. The group meets at 2024 Lehigh Street, Allentown, PA 18103. Call for dates in July and August.

**New Jersey**

**Karen Ann Quinlan Hospice** 800-882-1117 www.karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement

**Compassionate Care Hospice** 570-296-3591 http://cchnet.net/