Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

December 2018

Grief is often compared to a river, the multitude of emotions ebbing and flowing, cresting and falling. The first holiday a person faces after the death of a loved one is akin to encountering rapids on that river.

When it comes to the holiday season, there are three types of griever: the floaters, the mutineers and the navigators. Floaters are people who essentially abandon the oars and go with the flow, allowing others to coordinate their holidays, often caving into the pressure of others, sometimes agreeing to attend events and activities so as not to make waves. Next there are the mutineers, griever with an oar in the water and an eye on the water, padding to avoid obstacles in the path, slowing down to take in the scenery and to rest.

Using this river analogy, can you identify which kind of griever are you? Whether you’re a floater, a mutineer or a navigator, consider the three Cs this holiday season:

Choose: It’s easy to drift into events and activities that actually increase our pain, but we don’t have to go with the flow. We can make choices and decide which activities to participate in, who we want to be with, and what we want to do. One of the choices to consider is how to mark the loss of your loved one during the holidays. Finding ways to recognize and acknowledge the deceased can bring a positive focus to our grief. This may be done any number of ways—lighting a candle, offering up a prayer or giving voice to sadness.

Compromise: Each person deals with loss in their own way. When we share our thoughts and feelings, we may find the ways we’re coping with loss may be different from other members in the family. We need to consider what we need, what others need and what the family needs. We may need to compromise on activities especially if there are young children in the family.

Communicate: It’s important to discuss our choices with others, especially those most affected by them. Tell others what you want and need and what is NOT helpful as you attempt to balance Merriment with sorrow. Unknown expectations generally go unfulfilled and lead to disappointment and hurt.

Whether you’re a floater, a mutineer or a navigator during this holiday season, find time for rest. The holidays can be physically and emotionally draining when grieving. Include rest and quiet and encourage healthy eating and hydration for the entire family.

Jean

That first holiday season, hope flickered like the flame of a distant candle. I could see the flame, yet I could not seem to get close to it. As healing came, hope became more than a distant ray of light. It changed to a glow that could light my way.”

–Elise Cole
Activities for Grieving Families

For grieving children and their families, the holidays often bring more sorrow than joy. Here are a few ideas to help you navigate the difficult days and moments. The more that the children are encouraged to participate, the greater the opportunity for healing.

1. Take an empty gift box and decorate it with colorful paper, bows or a photo collage. Use color Xerox copies if you don’t want to damage original photos. The box should be wrapped so that the top can be removed. Encourage family members to write down ways that the deceased was a gift to them. They may share how the person made them feel, the things he or she did to help or support them, or something they learned from the person. Then set aside time when the family gathers to share these heartfelt reflections and include the loved one in your holiday.

2. Make a toast at a meal in honor of your loved one’s memory. Encourage others to share something they admired about the person.

3. Light a special candle and place it on the dinner table. Acknowledge that this candle is lit to honor the life and legacy of your loved one.

4. A few days before the holiday, set up a small “memory table.” On the table place, encourage family to display various remembrances of the deceased: a photo, a card from the deceased, or perhaps a gift or memento received from them. These memory tables are helpful because contributors do not have to say much.

5. Give a monetary gift to a charitable organization in remembrance of your loved one. Perhaps the children could collect non-perishable items for a women’s shelter or a food pantry.

6. Doing something for others during the holiday season helps us feel good, takes the focus off ourselves for a short time, and enables us to appreciate the blessings that are still present in our lives. Consider donating your time for someone or some organization.

Choice & Change

When it comes to the holidays, don’t be afraid to break from tradition, especially if tradition feels too sad, lonely or painful. Consider scaling down and tweaking your plans.

Change the time. If your family normally gathers for a holiday dinner, consider getting together at a different time or place. Meet for brunch, lunch, appetizers or just desserts. Consider serving the food buffet style instead of a sit-down meal.

Change the purpose. Instead of traditional religious services, find and attend either a Blue Christmas service or a Longest Night event, a service typically held on or close to the winter solstice. These somber gatherings acknowledge that this is not necessarily a season of joy and they invite participants to meditate on the sorrows of the heart.

Change the scale: One family was divided on what to do. Some believed that decorating a Christmas tree was an important tribute to their late son and brother. Other family members saw it as disrespectful and frivolous. They talked through each point of view and decided that they would have a small tree, not situated in the formal living room but in the family room. Those who wanted to help decorate could, but those who chose not to would also be respected. By scaling down the tradition and giving choice, all were able to deal with loss in their own way.

Change the setting: One family elected to go away for the holidays. It didn’t exactly feel like Christmas when they gathered at a Caribbean island, but that was the point. While grieving the loss of their father, an avid skier, a complete change of scenery allowed them to create new memories while grieving the loss of their father.
Grief & Loss Support Groups

Support groups provide the opportunity to be with others who have experienced the loss of a loved one. Participants learn about resources, coping techniques and ways to reconcile the loss of a loved one.

Mark your calendars! In 2019, we will be offering two types of Grief and Loss Support Groups and each group will meet for six weeks. We ask that people who sign up plan to commit to attending all six sessions. We will be offering a group for bereaved adults who are grieving the loss of a parent and another group for those grieving the loss of a spouse.

The Parental Loss Support Group will be held on consecutive Thursday evenings from 6-8 pm beginning January 17th (January 17, 24, 31 and February 7, 14 and 21).

The Spousal Loss Support Group will be held on consecutive Tuesday evenings from 6-8 pm beginning March 5th (March 5, 12, 19, 26, April 2 and 9).

For additional information or to register to attend either support group, please contact Dawn at (484) 526-2499.

Resources

Good Grief Workshops

Feelings and thoughts are often quite intense after experiencing the death of someone we loved. How do you handle the unpredictable nature of grief? Why does a certain song on the radio suddenly reduce us to tears?

This is why we offer the Good Grief Workshops (formerly known as the Newly Bereaved Workshops). These workshops are designed to help participants understand the emotional, social, physical and spiritual impact of loss. Participants will better understand the variety of grief reactions they may encounter as well as coping strategies while honoring the uniqueness of their grief.

During the month of December, we’re offering the same workshop at two different locations. Preregistration is required. Please call Dawn at (484) 526-2499 to register. Here are the upcoming workshop times and locations:

**Tuesday, December 4th from 6-8 pm** at St. Luke’s Allentown Campus, 1736 Hamilton Street, Allentown – 18104 in the ground floor conference room (east wing).

**Wednesday, December 12th from 6-8 pm** at St. Luke’s Quakertown Campus, St. Luke’s Hospital-Quakertown Campus, 1021 Park Avenue, Quakertown, 18951 in the cafeteria conference room.

Open/Drop-In Support Groups

Open/Drop-In Support Groups are designed to offer continued support to griever 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. They are facilitated by a bereavement counselor but are directed by group members in terms of topics for discussion. Currently we offer two 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.
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.

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. 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 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. A second 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.

Healing Hearts Loss, Grief and Bereavement Center in Emmaus is offering two 6-week survivors of suicide loss support groups, one for adults and one for teens beginning Wednesday, September 5, 2018 from 6-7 pm. Please call 610-421-8625 to register. Suggested $10 donation.

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 or contact these local chapters: Lehigh Valley (484-597-0240), Quakertown (267-380-0130) and Easton (610-866-5468).

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

VNA Hospice of Monroe County provides an adult support group to anyone who has experienced the death of a loved one within the past year. These groups are held on the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month from 12:00 noon—1:30 pm at 502 VNA Road, Route 447, East Stroudsburg, PA 18301. Please call 570-421-5390 to learn more.

Pocono VNA offers a support group for those who have experienced the death of a loved one within the past 12 months. 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.

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