Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke’s Hospice Bereavement Program

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St. Luke’s Hospice
484-526-2499

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The holiest of holidays are those kept by ourselves in silence and apart: the secret anniversaries of the heart. ~ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

When we grieve the death of a loved one, holidays, anniversaries and other days often become painful triggers. Memories are the grieving mind’s invitation to remember rather than to forget. We remember that it was one month or one year ago that our loved one was alive and that provides a context in which we can place an event that still seems unreal and unimaginable. The anniversary gives us another opportunity to revisit the death in order to believe the unbelievable and accept the unacceptable a little more fully.

Some days can catch us off guard. Fourth of July brought a woman to tears because for the first time she realized it wasn’t about outdoor grilling, it was viewing the most spectacular fireworks display with her husband. Then there are other dates indelibly etched in our memory … the day he received the diagnosis or the first week of her chemotherapy treatments.

As difficult dates loom on the horizon, we dread them, realizing that the tears we’d hoped were behind us will well up again, and the loneliness of missing the person will rise to the surface. It’s tempting to think you can avoid these painful reminders and pretend it’s a day like any other day. One man I knew decided that as the first Christmas without his wife approached, he was going to flee to Mexico. He told me he was going to sit on a beach, enjoy the sun and not think about the holidays. “And I’m not coming back until January,” he emphatically said. Off he went and when I saw him in January, I asked how his strategy for avoiding the holidays had worked. His words were telling. “They have Christmas in Mexico, you know,” he told me. He was unable to avoid the memories.

We have a choice. We cannot escape the impact of these special days; these reminders of life and death are unavoidable. The only choice is whether we will control the grief or whether we will allow the grief to control us. Avoidance doesn’t work well, because just when we least expect it, grief taps us on the shoulder and consumes us. We may even get through the actual day, but the grief attack will occur a day or so earlier, or a week or two later. Reconciling our loss is best accomplished by working at it, not by ignoring and hoping it will go away. Turn to the next page for some ideas you can try when a tough day is approaching.

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.
News & Events

How to Manage Tough Days

► **Depart from your usual activities.** Take the dreaded day off from work since there’s no use pretending that this day is like any other day. Don’t allow anyone to accuse you of “wallowing in your grief” by doing this. Taking time to mourn and remember is actually facing reality much more than avoiding it.

► **Choose the company you keep.** Don’t assume that the best people to surround you are those with whom you’ve always spent that day. You may feel more comfortable with someone who has been in your shoes.

► **Don’t wait for others to remember.** Your grief easily slips from the minds of even your closest friends and family. Take the initiative and call people when the dread of the day’s approach first starts to trouble you. Cash in those “if there’s anything I can do” offers. Be specific and tell people what you need – someone to drive you to the cemetery, to take you to lunch or to provide a shoulder for you to cry on.

► **Introduce ritual.** A memorial service, the lighting of a memorial candle or a mass said for the deceased can not only mark the day, but also be symbolic of your survival and determination.

► **Claim your memories.** Take out the photograph albums, scrapbooks, love letters and line up all the gifts and souvenirs you cherish. Call to mind the joys as well as the struggles that shaped the relationship with your loved one. Doing this can be painful at first, but memories have a wonderful way of softening as we work with them.

► **Do what is meaningful to you.** On a birthday, celebrate the person’s life as well as commemorating their death. Do an activity that you would have enjoyed together. Or write a new obituary which contains all the memories you have of the person, their physical appearance, idiosyncrasies and qualities that you want to remember.

► **Re-read the cards and notes you received and the visitors book from the funeral.** These may remind you that in the most difficult days of your life, you were not alone, and that the people who cared then still care now, even though they may not be as vocal or forthcoming.

► **Take time to look forward.** While you grieve the past, celebrate today’s joys. Count the blessings you have, and the people who are part of your life. Are there any of these relationships that could use some attention? Are there things that could be said to those who still support you?

► **Think big and think small.** Plan one thing you would like for the future, whether it’s redecorating a room or planning a vacation. But also think small. Do something on this tough day for yourself. Buy a book you’ve been meaning to read, rearrange the living room furniture, go for a walk or take in a movie. Do something you would like to do for you!

Anniversaries and special days allow us the opportunity to take inventory, to review some lessons learned and to plan ahead. And if nothing else, they serve to remind us that we have made it thus far, and that in itself is worth celebrating.
**News & Events**

**Six-Week Group Starting Up**

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

The Spouse/Partner Loss Group is for anyone who has lost a spouse, partner or significant other. Losing someone we chose to spend our life with poses issues of loneliness and navigating new roles. This group will be held on consecutive Thursday evenings from 6-8 pm beginning October 3rd (October 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 and November 7) at St. Luke’s Allentown Hospital Campus, 1736 Hamilton St., Allentown, 18104. Pre-register early as these groups fill up quickly and please commit to attending all six sessions as each session builds upon the previous one. To register, call Jean Francis at (484) 526-2514.

**Healing Rhythms Coming**

For a truly unique approach to healing from loss, join our next drumming group. The drum is a vehicle to express thoughts and feelings without words. Research indicates that drumming accelerates physical healing, boosts the immune system, releases emotional trauma and produces feelings of well-being. Drumming circles also provide a sense of connectedness with other griever.

Our next drumming group will be held on five consecutive **Saturday mornings in November (Nov 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29) from 10am to 12 noon** at Lehigh Valley Friends Meetinghouse, 4116 Bath Pike (Route 512), Bethlehem, 18017. This group is led by a Remo HealthRhythms endorsed facilitator. To register, call Dawn at 484-526-2499. For more information on the benefits of drumming, visit this web site: www.lvdrumcircle.com.

**Open/Drop-In Grief Groups**

Open/Drop-In Grief Groups allow you the chance to receive and provide support in a collaborative environment. Groups are facilitated by a grief counselor and participants suggest topics for discussion. Come and meet others to discuss similar challenges and experiences following the death of a loved one. No registration needed. We offer three groups and each one meets for 90 minutes:

**Easton:** **First Monday of every month from 4-5:30 pm** at St. Luke’s Anderson Hospital Campus, 1872 St. Luke’s Blvd, Easton, 18045. We meet in the Medical Office building next to the hospital in the lower level conference room A. Due to Labor Day weekend, we will meet on Monday, September 16th.

**Quakertown:** **Second Monday of every month from 6-7:30 pm** at St. Luke’s Quakertown Hospital Campus, 1021 Park Avenue, Quakertown, 18951 in the cafeteria conference room (lower level of the hospital).

**Brodheadsville:** **Fourth Tuesday of the month from 1:30-3 pm** in the second floor community room at the Brodheadsville ShopRite, 107 Kinsley Drive, Brodheadsville, 18322. The community room is near the entrance to the store. Follow signs and take stairs or elevator to the second floor.

**Lunch & Loss-Miners Campus**

Beginning October 8, we will hold eight Tuesday afternoon group sessions (from noon until 2 p.m.) at St. Luke’s Miners Hospital Campus, 360 W. Ruddle St., Coaldale, 18218. Each week we will focus on a different topic related to grief and loss. Lunch provided. All meetings will take place in the Education Room, first floor. You can come to one or all of the sessions. More information to come. Questions? Call Tara George at (484) 526-2314.
**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** at 522 W. Maple Street, Allentown 18101 offers a professionally led monthly bereavement support group for LGBT people who have experienced loss. The group meets on the 4th Tuesday 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), Carbon County chapter (484-719-6753) and Quakertown chapter (484-408-7314).

**Doylestown Hospital Hospice** offers a variety of support groups and programs that change seasonally. 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 offered at many locations in the Lehigh Valley. 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 their website — www.griefshare.org — and enter your zip code to find 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 Kemps at 610-422-8490 or email jenkemps@ptd.net. The evening support group meets on the third Monday of the month from 7:30-8:30 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 610-402-7481 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.

**Suicide:** The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has excellent information on risk factors, statistics, education and local services. Visit their website at www.afsp.org and enter your zip code to find the chapter nearest you. All chapters are run by people who have experienced the suicide of a loved one.

**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 Home Care & Hospice** 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