Grief and gratitude are two words that don’t belong in the same sentence. Or do they? Well as it turns out, neuroscientists – those folks who study the gray blob in our heads – have learned that it’s possible to be grieving and grateful at the same time. Even more astounding is that gratitude affects the brain at the biological level, thus becoming one of the most powerful grief healing tools we have. Here’s how:

Antidepressants like Prozac and Effexor increase the function of neurotransmitters in the brain and increase the production of serotonin, the naturally occurring chemical that improves mood. In essence, fine-tuning these complex brain connections allow people who are experiencing hopelessness, apathy and loss of interest in activities they once enjoyed are able to experience pleasure. Researchers have learned that the act of practicing gratefulness activates the same brain region that produces these feel-good chemicals. Additionally, gratitude toward others increases brain activity that makes social interactions more enjoyable.

Trying to think of things you are grateful for forces you to focus on the positive aspects in your life. A 2003 study compared the well-being of participants who kept a weekly list of things they were grateful for with participants who kept a list of things that irritated them. Guess what happened? The gratitude-focused participants exhibited increased well-being. The conscious focus on blessings had emotional as well as interpersonal benefits.

When we are grieving the death of someone we loved, though, it’s hard to feel grateful for anything. But guess what? It doesn’t matter. You don’t have to find anything to be grateful, it’s the searching that contributes to these increased feelings of wellness. It’s not finding gratitude that matters most; it’s remembering to look in the first place.

Remembering to be grateful is a form of emotional intelligence. Another study revealed that practicing gratefulness actually affects neuron density in the brain. These density changes suggest that as emotional intelligence increases, the neurons in these areas become more efficient and eventually it takes less effort to be grateful. And gratitude doesn’t just make your brain happy — it also creates a positive feedback loop in your relationships. All of this can occur without a prescription for antidepressants.

Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow. ~ Melody Beattie
Cultivating Gratitude in Kids

Gratitude is a skill that can increase a child’s happiness, too. It teaches them to be more empathetic and thankful for what they have. Here are some ways to strengthen this skill:

1. Say please and thank you. Manners prevent entitlement. Children become more appreciative of what comes their way.

2. Point out awe-inspiring moments. If you view a spectacular sunset, comment on it. If the sound of a baby’s laughter warms your heart, tell your children. Encourage them to look and share their awe-inspiring moments with you.

3. Share gratitude at mealtime or at bedtime. Take a few moments at the dinner table to share what you’re thankful for. Then allow each family member to express their gratitude. Or use the same concept at bedtime.

4. Compliment others. Encourage your children to do the same. Share the things you appreciate about another person with them.

5. Create a family gratitude list. Post the list on the fridge and encourage family members add to it when necessary. A similar idea is creating a gratitude jar. Use a large empty jar and place it in an area that is accessible to the whole family. Include blank pieces of paper for all to record their thoughts. Depending on the child’s age, skill level and desire, they may want to write down their thoughts or express gratitude through drawings. Fold and store the slips of paper in the jar. Then find a regular time each week to share the family’s gratitude list.

Coping with the Holidays

In a few short months, families will gather for the holidays. But when you are grieving the death of a loved one, these are poignant times that we remember someone is missing.

There is no right or wrong way to get through holidays and special days when someone you loved has died, but planning ahead and learning your limitations helps. That’s why we’re holding several “Coping with the Holidays” workshops this fall, to help you learn coping techniques and strategies. To register for the workshop nearest you, please call Dawn Cavanaugh at (484) 526-2499:

Allentown—Thursday, October 24 from 6-8 pm at St. Luke’s Allentown Campus, 1736 Hamilton St., Allentown, 18104 (Dimmig Education Center).

Brodheadsville—Tuesday, November 19 from 1:30—3:30 p.m. at the Brodheadsville ShopRite, 107 Kinsley Dr., Brodheadsville 18322 (2nd floor community room).

Coaldale—Tuesday, November 12 from 12-2 p.m. at St. Luke’s Miners campus, 360 W. Ruddle St., Coaldale, 18218. (Education room, first floor).

Easton—Monday, November 4 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. at St. Luke’s Anderson Campus, 1872 St. Luke’s Blvd., Easton 18045 (Medical Office Building, lower level conference room A).

Quakertown—Thursday, November 21 from 6-8 p.m. at St. Luke’s Quakertown campus, 1021 Park Avenue, Quakertown, PA 18951 (Taylor conference room A-lower level).

Stroudsburg—Wednesday, November 6 from 6-8 p.m. at St. Luke’s Monroe campus, 100 St. Luke's Lane, Stroudsburg 18360 (conference room A-lower level).
Starting October 8, we will explore various aspects about grief and loss on Tuesday afternoons 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 is provided. All meetings will take place in the Education Room, first floor. You can come to one or all of the sessions. Our first meeting will explore different ways we grieve. Future topics include guided imagery, loss history and factors that influence grief. Please call Tara George at (484) 526-2314 to register for one or all of the sessions.

Drop-in Grief Groups allow people 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:

**Brodheadsville: Third Tuesday of the month from 1:30-3 pm in the community room at the Brodheadsville ShopRite, 107 Kinsley Drive, Brodheadsville, 18322.** The community room is on the second floor near the entrance to the store.

**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.

**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).**
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 Bailey Benner at 610-515-3526), Carbon County chapter (484-719-6753) and the 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 web site — 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 7-8:30 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 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.

**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 web site 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 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