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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Sometimes only one person is missing and the whole world seems depopulated.
~ Alphonse de Lamartine

Grief during the holidays serves up the perfect storm, where joyous memories clash with reality and expectations. Celebrations between the months of November and January are sandwiched together, a virtual laboratory of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. No wonder griever dread this time of year.

Several factors work against griever during the holiday season. Daylight is waning and the nights are getting colder. People sensitive to these subtle changes may feel sluggish and retreat indoors. Just getting out of bed in the morning may feel like a major accomplishment. Then, too, the holiday season is awash with memories which can be confusing as well as painful. Reminders are everywhere. Decorations, music, fragrances, people, places and traditions — the list goes on and on. Anything can trigger a memory and an unexpected surge of emotion.

When you’re grieving the death of a loved one, you’re likely to feel out of step with the rest of the world. Mail continues to arrive for your loved one and a simple trip to the grocery store provides a sober reminder that you’re not in sync with the season. Uplifting music is piped throughout stores as employees smile and urge you to “have a happy holiday.”

Grievers are encouraged not to associate the word “perfect” with the holidays. The truth is that holidays and special days do challenge personal as well as family equilibrium. They stimulate and stress us. If you are honest with yourself, maybe the holidays were always stressful, even before the death of someone you loved, and now there’s a hole in the fabric of the family.

You have a choice. You can choose to believe that this holiday season can still be a significant time for you. It will be different because you are grieving, but it can also be a meaningful time with others. It may hurt, but it may also hold hope. Please turn to page 2 to learn what you can do to manage this holiday season.

Jean
One of the best ways to survive the holidays after the death of someone you loved is to plan ahead. Regardless of what you do, there is no way to avoid having to deal with pain and sadness. No one can offer you a way around this and despite the temptation, try to avoid canceling the holidays altogether. Accept the fact that parts of the holiday are not going to be easy. They will be different because life is now different but keep these points in mind:

Set realistic expectations of yourself. Grieving takes energy. Be gentle with yourself and your family and allow yourself to take whatever time for yourself that you need.

Surround yourself with people who love and support you. Find those people who accept your feelings, who understand that the holidays are more difficult, and who allow you to express all that you are feeling.

Talk about your grief and about the person who has died. Share your feelings and memories with people you trust. Say the person’s name and invite others to do the same.

Don’t get caught up in unreasonable expectations. Losses and separations of all kinds make this a difficult season. For many of us, the holidays produce more stress and pain than joy. In light of this, there’s no reason for guilt or for wondering if your grief is “ruining” the holidays for others. You don’t need to provide the perfect holiday for anyone.

Embrace your memories. Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after someone dies. Sharing and hearing stories, crying and laughing together keeps the person who died part of these special days.

Take care of yourself. Avoid using alcohol or drugs to self-medicate your mood. Physical exercise is often a healthier antidote for sadness or depression.

Create a new tradition or ritual that accommodates your current situation. Some people find comfort in the old traditions while others find them unbearably painful. Discuss with your family the activities you want to include or exclude this year.

Tell others what you need. Make them aware of the times that may be particularly rough for you and make suggestions on ways they can support you.

Seek comfort in your faith. If your faith is important, seek out a familiar and supportive community to provide solace.

Remember that your grief is important and unique. Be patient with yourself, love yourself and don’t let anyone take away your grief. Do know that there are times, despite your best efforts when nothing will seem to work. So remember—be gentle with yourself and with your family.
News & Events

Children and the Holidays

When death occurs, it’s important for families to talk about how they will handle the holidays. It’s critical to include the children in these discussions. When we include them, we teach them the value of making their voices heard and getting their needs met. After the death of a family member, the holiday season will look different and it’s important to talk about how it will look. Below is advice from children about how to handle the holidays after the death of someone they loved:

► Ask us about what traditions we may want to keep and which ones we may want to change.
► We may have ideas on how we want to remember the person who has died. Our ideas may be different from the adults or even from our siblings. Please try to include as many of these ideas as possible.
► It’s OK for us to be sad, but it’s also OK for us to be happy, too.
► It’s OK for the adults to shed tears. This gives us permission to shed a few of our own.
► We can tell when the adults are stressed out. Please take care of yourself for us.
► Don’t ignore the fact that someone is missing. Please talk about the person who died.
► Please remember that we are still kids and that we still want our holidays to be fun.

Lunch & Loss Group

There are only two more sessions left in our lunch and loss series on Tuesday afternoons at St. Luke’s Miners Hospital Campus, 360 W. Ruddle St., Coaldale, 18218. Sessions are on December 3 and 10 in the first floor Education room from noon to 2 p.m. and lunch is provided. We’ll talk about getting through the holidays when you’re grieving. Please call Tara George at (484) 526-2314 to register for one or both of these sessions.

Drop-In Groups

Drop-In Groups enable you the chance to receive and provide support in a collaborative environment. Groups are facilitated by a grief counselor and participants are invited to suggest topics for discussion. Meet others and explore challenges you face following the death of a loved one. No registration needed:

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. Meeting are held in the Medical Office building, 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).

Brodheadsville: We’ve changed our location!!! Beginning in January, we will meet on the third Tuesday of the month from 1:30-3 pm at the Western Pocono Community Library, 131 Pilgrim Way, Brodheadsville 18322. No meeting in December.

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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 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: Lehigh Valley chapter (484-891-0823), Carbon County chapter (484-719-6753), Easton chapter (call Bailey Benner at 610-513526) and Quakertown chapter (484-408-7314).

**Doylesstown 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 Kems 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 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