

COMFORT FOR THE GRIEVING HEART

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

July 2015

The Individual Journey of Grief

*"It is a mistake to lump all bereaved individuals together.
For instance, not all widows grieve alike merely because each has lost a husband.
It is equally incorrect to assume that although two individuals lose the same person,
they each have experienced the same loss."*

Therese Rando, How To Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies

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You are a unique individual. You have your own way of looking at the world, which has been shaped by your experiences and influenced by those around you. Yet when you grieve, you want to compare yourself to what you think you "should" be doing, thinking, or feeling, as if there is a right and wrong way to experience loss. But if you are unique, then maybe your experience is too. Is it okay to cope with your loss in your own way?

Many of us think that there is a standard way of grieving, that if we just do this or don't do that, we'll be fine. We will tell ourselves and anyone who asks, "I'm fine," even when we're trying to keep so busy because we can't bear to sit down and feel that overwhelming sense of loss deep inside.

The truth is that many things can affect how we grieve and cope with our loss. Even within the same family, you will notice differences on how grief is expressed. Factors such as the type and nature of your relationship with your loved one, the circumstances of the loss, and your own personal characteristics (your age, gender, coping style, health, cultural background, and belief system) will impact your experience.

It's important to recognize that we might be holding on to certain myths about grief, such as what it will feel and look like or how long it will last. When we believe that our grief should only last one or two months, we can feel confused and disappointed when after six months, we still feel deeply sad. Beliefs lead us to create expectations for ourselves, which can add to our distress when those beliefs are not accurate.

So what can you expect as your grieve? Therese Rando suggests that the grief experience takes longer and requires more energy than most people think. It impacts you in many areas of your life—psychologically, socially, and physically—not just emotionally. You may have trouble thinking and making decisions and on some days, you might feel like you are going crazy. There will be certain dates, events, and other stimuli that will bring upsurges in your grief. Unfortunately, society will have unrealistic expectations about your mourning and may respond inappropriately to you.

I would invite you to be loving and generous with yourself as you grieve. Allow yourself the space to feel and experience your grief in a way that is right for you. It is my hope that the resources and reflections shared on the following pages will help you to do just that.

Yours in service,
Christine

Upcoming Events

Sponsored by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

Grief and Loss Support Groups

St. Luke's Hospice offers 6-week support groups for adults grieving the loss of someone significant in their lives. Our support groups provide a place to come together with others who have experienced the loss of a loved one to share stories, offer and receive support, and find hope and healing. A group can offer both peer support and education and information about the grief journey. It is important that participants are able to attend all 6 weeks. **Registration for the group is required.** There are no drop-ins permitted. Please note that the group is subject to be canceled if sufficient registration is not reached. Please call for more information.

July 20th – August 24th, 2015 (Mondays) from 3-4:30pm

Meetings will be held at **St. Luke's Hospice House**, 2455 Black River Road, Bethlehem, PA.

Call Christine at (610) 997-7132 to register.

Chronicling the Lives of Those We've Lost: Memoir Writing Workshop

“Our job when we mourn someone is to remember them so fully and so completely that they are not really lost to us.” Those words, often shared with the bereaved by the Rev. Anne Huey, provide comfort. How, then, to capture the memories following loss? Writing a memoir about a loved one—whether it is about a spouse, parent, a friend or beloved aunt—takes the memories that live in our brains, where details over time may be forgotten, and commits them to paper. A lasting keepsake is created while, at the same time, we have a chance to examine the relationship we've lost.

People sometimes think a special skill is needed to write a memoir. They equate writing with school and books. They think it must be formal—a publishable document. That is not the goal. In this case, for those of us who want to chronicle the lives of those we've lost, being a writer means something else. In the words of the late author William Zinsser, “writers are the custodians of memory and that's what you must become if you want to leave some kind of record of your life and of the family you were born into.” The important thing is to begin to put the stories and memories down on paper.

Sound interesting? Plan to join us for a 6-week workshop in the fall, starting October 8th from 6:30-8pm. For more information or to register, contact Christine at (610) 997-7132.

Service of Remembrance

We gather periodically as family members of our patients and as a Hospice staff to remember those who have died. Our Services of Remembrance are inter-faith and are offered as a way in which we may take time to reflect, remember, and celebrate the lives and the legacies of those who have passed from ours. The names of the deceased will be read at these services unless we are notified that you prefer otherwise. Please bring your family and friends and join us for this time of remembrance.

For patients served by our Bethlehem office and Hospice House and who died between March 1 and June 30, 2015, the Service of Remembrance will be held on Sunday, August 16, 2015, at 3pm at Church of the Assumption, 4101 Old Bethlehem Pike, Bethlehem, PA, 18015.

Resources and Reflections for Grieving Adults

Suggestions for the Journey

While each individual grief journey is unique, there are things you can do along the way to help yourself through it. Here are a few suggestions:

- Give yourself permission to feel your loss
- Accept social support and tell others what you need
- Be realistic in your expectations of yourself as a griever
- Give some form of expression to all of your feelings
- Find ways to remember your loved one
- Take care of yourself as you work through the grief process

From *How to Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies* by Therese Rando

A Meditation on Grief

“Grief

Peels away masks,
Breaks the minds habits,
Slows us down,
Takes us deep inside ourselves,
Rearranges our insides,
Churns up unresolved issues,
Brings everything into question.

This is how grief transforms us.”

From *Honoring Grief* by
Alexandra Kennedy

“Open to Loss”

“Someone you have given love to and received love from has died. You are grieving. You are “bereaved,” which literally means you have been “torn apart” and have “special needs.” You are beginning, or are in the midst of, a journey that is painful, often lonely, and naturally frightening.

Among your most special needs right now is to have the courage to grieve and mourn in a culture that doesn’t always invite you to feel safe to do so. There is a difference between grieving and mourning. Grief is the constellation of internal thoughts and feelings we have when someone we love dies. Mourning is when you take the grief you have on the inside and express it outside yourself. In other words, mourning is grief in action.

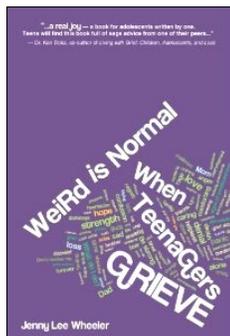
I encourage you to take grief’s hand and let it lead you through the darkness and toward the light. You may not see the light at first, but forge ahead with courage, and with the faith that the light of hope and happiness does exist. Feel your pain, sorrow, sadness, disbelief, agony, heartbreak, fear, anxiety, and loneliness as much as you can.

You might have the urge to “keep your chin up” and stay busy and wait to “get over” your grief. Yet, ironically, the only way to help these hard feelings pass is to wade right into them. To get in and get dirty. Grief isn’t clean, tidy, or convenient. All major life changes start with chaos and messiness. Yet feeling it and expressing it is the only way to feel whole once again. Grief that’s not reconciled or integrated can leave you feeling “stuck” or empty. Your ability to engage in life could be inhibited, and you might feel like you’ve shut down.

Instead, choose grief. And as you walk with your grief, actively mourn in ways that are unique to your personality. Cry when you need to, call a friend when you feel overwhelmed, join a grief support group, express yourself through writing, music, dance, or sports. By taking action, you will eventually integrate the death of your loved one into your life. In exchange, you will find the hope, courage, and desire to once again live a full and rewarding life.”

From *The Mourner’s Book of Courage* by Alan Wolfelt

Support for Grieving Children and Teens



Weird is Normal When Teenagers Grieve

Jenny Lee Wheeler

“A teen-to-teen support book”

“The first thing I’d like to do is give you permission to grieve. You have the right to be grieving, whether you have lost a friend, family members, or even a pet. No type of loss is too small. One person could lose their grandparent and another lose their dog, and both people would have the right to be grieving and to receive support from others. Also, you don’t have to get over your loss according to any certain timetable; you always have the right to grieve and to need comfort from others. And you don’t need to act tough or unaffected by the loss to show other people that you are strong.”

“Things You Can Do That Might Help Yourself Feel Better When You Feel Sad”

Cry

Talk to someone you trust about your feelings

Write your feelings down

Draw a picture of your sadness

Go outside and find at least five things that you think are beautiful

Listen to your favorite music

Move your body around

Sing your favorite song

Play dress up

Ask someone to watch a funny movie with you

Hug people you love

Think of something nice to do for someone else and then do it.

Make a list of things that you feel grateful for.

From *Finding Your Own Way to Grieve* by Karla Helbert



Graffiti Wall: A Grief Activity for Kids

A graffiti wall can be a place in your home where everyone can draw or write down their thoughts and feelings. It’s an activity that encourages the expression of emotion in a fun, casual way. You will need some strong tape, a large piece (or several pieces) of paper, and some crayons or markers.

1. Choose a wall in your home where you will set up the “graffiti wall.” You will leave it up for a while so choose a space that won’t be in the way.
2. Tape the paper to the wall and divide it in half. Label one side for happy days (and feelings) and the other for sad days (and feelings).
3. Fill a box of materials (crayons and markers of different colors) and keep it close to the wall.

Let everyone know that participation is encouraged but optional. The wall is for expressing feelings. You can write words or draw pictures. Some days you will feel like drawing on the happy side, some days on the sad side, some days neither, and some days both. The wall can be left up for a while. Decide as a family when it’s time to take it down and what you want to do with it..

Reprinted from www.whatsyourgrief.com/graffiti-wall-a-grief-activity-for-kids/

Honoring the Journey

Additional Places to Find Support and Share Your Story

This is a listing of free bereavement resources in the area. If you have a need for something and don't see it on this list, please call Christine at (610) 997-7132 for referrals to other services.

Cancer Support Community of Lehigh Valley with St. Luke's offers the Hope and Healing Series, a series of creative classes at St. Luke's Cancer Center-Anderson Campus, primarily in the Hope and Healing Room. Any person or loved one affected by cancer can register for this series. Programs offered include T'ai Chi, Drumming, Art of Healing Dance, Labyrinth, Jewelry Making, Journaling, Men's Group, Heart Rhythm Meditation, Yoga, and Creative Expression. Classes are open to anyone affected by cancer. Programs are free, but registration is required. Call 610-861-7555 or email info@cancersupportglv.org to register or for more information about classes, dates and times.

The Compassionate Friends offers ongoing support groups for parents, grandparents, and adult siblings grieving the loss of a child, grandchild, or sibling.

TCF of Lehigh Valley meets at Sacred Heart Hospital, 2nd floor, 421 Chew Street in Allentown. The group meets the 2nd Monday each month at 7pm. For more information, call 484-597-0240.

TCF of Quakertown meets at St. Luke's Hospital, ground floor, 1021 Park Ave in Quakertown in Taylor Conference Rooms A&B. This group is held the 2nd Tuesday each month from 7:30 – 9pm. For more information, call 215-536-0173.

TCF of Easton meets the 2nd Thursday each month from 7-9pm at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, 2115 Washington Blvd. in Easton. For more information call 610-866-5468.

TCF of Carbon County meets the 1st Wednesday each month from 6:30 – 8:30pm in the Palmerton Community Ambulance Association, 501 Delaware Ave in Palmerton. Please call 610-826-2938 for more information.

Family Answers holds a Survivors of Suicide support group at 402 North Fulton Street in Allentown, PA. This group is held the first and third Monday each month from 7-8pm. Call 610-435-9651 for more info.

Free Spirits is a group of more than 2 dozen older widows who go out to lunch once a month to keep active and offer support to each other--and to newer widows. Most are members of Church of the Manger UCC, Bethlehem. Call 610-866-8223 for more information.

Gentle Yoga for Grief, Stress, and Life Transitions offered by Wendy Littner Thomson, M.Ed., LPC, RYT. First session offered for free to caregivers whose loved one recently received hospice services from St Luke's Hospice. For location, times, or more information, please call 610-730-1992.

Grand View Hospital Hospice offers many groups and services that change seasonally. Please call 215-453-4210 for more information.

GriefShare Groups are a faith-based, evangelical approach to grief and loss. GriefShare groups are provided at several locations in the Lehigh Valley. To find a location near you, please visit www.griefshare.org.

Lehigh Valley Health Network offers grief support services in the form of counseling, support groups, and workshops for adults and children, as well as a lunch club for women. For more information, please call 610-969-0330.

VNA/Hospice of Monroe County offers a support group the 1st and 3rd Wednesday each month at noon. Call 570-421-5390 for more information.