

Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

December 2015

St. Luke's Hospice

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If you would like to be added to or removed from our mailing list, or if you would prefer to receive an electronic copy, please contact Dawn at (610) 997-7125.

The Most Wonderful Time of the Year...or is it?

"A question commonly asked by bereaved people at this time of year is "How can I get through the holidays?" There is no single answer. One important guiding principle is: do what is comfortable. Kenneth Doka, PhD, recounts a grief therapy session with a group of widows. "One woman whose husband recently died asked, 'Who should sit at the head of the table?' taking her husband's place. I asked the group how they had handled it. One woman placed her youngest grandchild there to remind the family of its continuity. Another said her eldest son sat there. Another woman said that she sat there since she was now the family leader". Which response was right? They all were. Each response meets the needs of the person, and each was a comfortable choice, explained Doka."

Taken from The Hospice Foundation of America

For most people, thinking about the holidays typically spent with family and friends, brings about happy memories and feelings of warmth and comfort. For those who have experienced the death of a loved one, the holidays hold a different meaning and can be a time where we intensely feel just how much life has changed. While we are sent messages that the holidays are a time to feel happiness and joy, those who are bereaved can experience sadness and loneliness. Our messages are quite different when we experience the conflict of facing the 'joy' of the holidays while feeling the pain of our grief.

The holidays do not necessarily have to be entirely sad or overwhelming. With some planning, you can anticipate activities and think ahead instead of reacting to what may happen. Getting caught off guard can create feelings of panic and anxiety, and planning can be helpful for mentally preparing yourself. Think about who you will spend time with; consider which traditions you want to carry on and which traditions may be too difficult this year; eliminate unnecessary stress and prioritize holiday tasks. Talk to your loved ones about what your limits are and ask for help. Allow yourself to say no, and to bow out of an event or activity if you become overwhelmed.

Most importantly, it is OK to just feel. If you feel happy, go with it! If you feel sad, give yourself permission to feel sad. If you want to cry, then let the tears flow. The task this holiday season may be holding both the joy and the sadness together and honoring both of these emotions as opposite, but equally important parts in the healing of your spirit. This time of year naturally brings about meaning and memories; a time when your grief may be heightened. You may find that your emotions are raw and at the surface. If you can, allow yourself to experience your feelings without judgment and give yourself permission to face this holiday unlike any that has come before. Giving yourself grace to feel your emotions may be the most important gift you receive this season.

-Mindy

News & Events

Open /Drop-in Support Group



Perhaps you've thought about attending a group but weren't sure if it was for you. Maybe you've already participated in a group and are looking to reconnect to people who understand.

Please join us for an open, ongoing support group. We will meet on the **first Friday of each month** from **10-11am** at St. Luke's Hospice House (2455 Black River Road, Bethlehem.) Our next meeting will be on **December 4, 2015**.

No registration is required, but you can contact Mindy with any questions.

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 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**, who died between **July 1, 2015 and October 31, 2015** the Service of Remembrance will be held on **Sunday, December 6 at 3 pm** at Wesley Church, 2540 Center Street, Bethlehem, PA 18017, 610-865-5715.

We are Moving!!



Effective December 9, 2015, the Bereavement Department will be moving. Our new address will be 240 Union Station Plaza, Bethlehem, PA 18015.

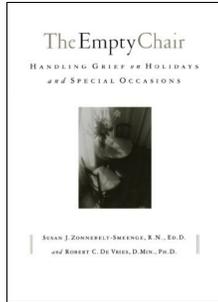
Our phone numbers will also be changing; however, we do not yet have that information to share. Once we obtain our new numbers, we will make sure to make an announcement. If you need to reach us and cannot do so by phone, feel free to email us (our emails are on page 1 of this newsletter).

If you attend a support group at our current office (Hospice House), please note that the groups will continue to be held at the Hospice House, 2455 Black River Road, Bethlehem, PA, 610-997-7120.

“Grace meets you where you are but does not leave you where it found you”

Anne Lamott

Resources and Reflections



The Empty Chair

Susan Zonnebelt Smeenge
and Robert C. De Vries

Losing a loved one whether a spouse, parent, child, sibling, or friend leaves people feeling overwhelmed and hopeless. Holidays and other special occasions seem to intensify the pain. Whether the occasion is Christmas or Easter, a birthday or anniversary, these celebrations force the bereaved to again face the reality of a loved one's absence. In *The Empty Chair*, the authors share a comforting blend of emotional support, spiritual guidance, and personal experience to help readers honor their loved one on important days. Those who support the bereaved mental health professionals, pastors, funeral home staff, and others will also appreciate this book for its reflective yet practical approach. www.amazon.com

No person is ever truly alone. Those who live no more, whom we loved, echo still within our thoughts, our words, our hearts.

-Richard Fife

For the young ones....



Remembering Ornament -
Holiday grief activity for
children and teens

You will need to buy plastic ornaments, available at craft stores, and have a variety of ribbon cut into 6" pieces, some strips of paper and some very small objects, like beads, rocks or snowflake confetti. For each color ribbon, assign a feeling (purple - mad, red - love, etc.). Identify the little objects as 'memories', and then cut the pieces of paper cut into 3" strips.

To get started, talk with kids about all the different emotions they feel when they think about the person they have lost. Some common emotions for young children may be sad, lonely, happy, scared, mad, love etc. For older kids there may be more complex emotions, like yearning, guilt, regret, hope, anger, etc. Next, explain that the confetti or other objects represent their memories, and ask the children to share some favorite memories of their loved one. Finally, allow kids to write or draw anything they would like on a strip of paper. This could be a message to the person who died, a memory, or whatever else they wish. Have the kids pick out the ribbons that match their feelings, the objects that represent their memories, and their messages on the strips of paper. Open the ornament and add the ribbon, objects and paper, then close it up, tie a ribbon to the top and you are all done! It's that easy!

Featured Website: www.griefnet.org

Griefnet.org is an internet community for persons dealing with grief, death and major loss. The online community is monitored by a clinical psychologist, who is assisted by trained volunteers, to oversee the content of the groups. Their online support groups are accessible 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Griefnet.org runs over 50 email based support groups for both adults and children. The site also has a library, bookstore and online memorials for members to create for their loved ones.

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 Mindy at (610) 997-7139 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. Programs are free, but registration is required. Call 610-861-7555 or email info@cancersupportglv.org to register or 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.

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.

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.

St. Francis Retreat House holds monthly grief support groups on the first Tuesday from 9:30-11:00 am or the first Thursday from 7:00-8:00 pm. Located at 3918 Chipman Avenue, Easton PA. Please call 610-515-9028 for more information.

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.

Soaring Spirits Regional Group Lehigh Valley is planning to hold monthly social gatherings for widowed individuals to provide opportunities to connect with others in a positive, caring, and supportive environment. For more information, please call Sonja Handwerk at 610-297-0057, email soaringspiritslvpa@yahoo.com, or follow on Facebook at Soaring Spirits International Group Lehigh Valley.

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 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.

Doylestown Hospital Hospice offers a variety of support groups, including a widow/widower group, a young survivors group, and an adult loss group. Visit www.dhospice.com or call 215-345-2838.