



Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

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Guilt is perhaps the most painful companion of death. ~ Coco Chanel

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Guilt. It is such a difficult emotion to sit with. Guilt breeds a mix of many feelings, including doubt, shame, inadequacy, insecurity, failure, unworthiness, self-judgment and blame, anxiety and fear. Wow. Those are some heavy, heavy emotions to be left sitting with. Research shows us that guilt, in all of its discomfort, is a normal and common reaction in grief. It is a normal response to the perception that we have somehow failed in our duty or obligation, or that we have done something wrong.

After someone dies, guilt can come to the surface for many of us and for many different reasons. Guilt for things we did or didn't do. Guilt for things said or unsaid. Guilt for things we knew, or didn't know. Guilt for decisions made, and now being questioned. And when we are grieving, sometimes the play button in our minds get stuck on feelings of guilt, and we end up rehashing things over and over again, allowing the cycle of guilt to remain at the surface of our thoughts. So when we are stuck on replay, what do we do to get unstuck? Ultimately, the choice to forgive must be made.

The authors at www.whatsyourgrief.com write that forgiveness is "a willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior to one who unjustly injured us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity and even love toward him or her". This definition is a beautiful way to describe the process that we go through when we make the choice to forgive someone else. Never an easy task, particularly when our hurt is deep, but it defines forgiveness as an act of making a decision about what to let go of and what to hold on to. If you have ever gone through the experience of forgiving someone, you may know that heaviness is lifted once these terms are defined. Lightness happens when we let go.

Why is it then, that forgiveness of ourselves is more difficult? This leaves us with a big question...how do we forgive ourselves? When we begin to explore self-forgiveness, it is important to acknowledge the guilt, embrace the feeling, and work to release the feelings of resentment and negativity. Sometimes we are quick to beat ourselves up about every decision that was made before a death, with having the benefit of hindsight to reassess the situation. It is important to become grounded in remembering what you knew at the time, why you did what you did, and what your intentions were. The authors of www.griefhealingblog.com write about guilt, and share that just because you *feel* guilty doesn't mean you *are* guilty. We must remember that as grievers, we are sometimes not thinking straight or feeling our strongest. We feel crazy, out of sorts and at times irrational. With that in mind, we consider every 'woulda, coulda, shoulda' and we find every way to allow guilt to settle in and become our new companion. Despite it being irrational at times, it is consuming. When someone we love dies, it is natural for us to search for an explanation; we are only human and we are wired to ask questions and search for answers. Guilt is driven by our beliefs and expectations, and dealing with it requires that we examine what we think we did wrong, face it and evaluate it as objectively as possible. What did you expect of yourself that you did not live up to? Were your expectations realistic? If they weren't, then you need to let go of them. Since you did all that you were capable of doing at the time, there simply is no basis for your guilt, and you need to let go of that as well. As Judy Belmont so succinctly puts it, "Forgive yourself for not having the foresight to know what now seems so obvious in hindsight".

-Mindy

Tips for Coping with Guilt...

Identify what it is that you feel guilty about. Resist the urge to keep such thoughts and feelings to yourself. Bring them out into the open where they can be examined. Share them with a trusted friend or counselor, who can view your thoughts and feelings more objectively, and challenge what may be irrational or illogical.

Listen to the messages you give yourself (the should haves, could haves and if only's), and realize the past is something you can do absolutely nothing about.

Live the next day or next week of your life as if you were guilt-free, knowing you can return to your guilt feelings any time you wish. Pick a start time, and stop yourself whenever you make any guilt-related statements.

If you are troubled by feeling relieved that your loved one's suffering has ended, know that a heavy burden has been lifted from your shoulders; you have been released from an emotionally exhausting and physically draining experience, and to feel relieved is certainly understandable.

If you believe in God or a higher power, consider what He or She has to say about forgiveness.

Participate in a support group — it's a powerful way to obtain forgiveness and absolution from others.

Be your own best friend. What would you have said to your best friend if this had happened to that person? Can you say the same to yourself?

Remember the good things you did in your relationship with your loved one and all the loving care you gave. Focus on the positive aspects: what you learned from each other, what you did together that brought you joy, laughter and excitement. Write those things down, hold onto them and read them whenever you need to.

Ask what you expected of yourself that you didn't live up to. How is it that you didn't? What were the circumstances at the time? What have you learned from this that you'll do differently next time?

What can you do to make amends? Find a way to genuinely apologize to your loved one's spirit and ask for forgiveness.

Have a visit with your loved one. Say aloud or in your mind whatever you didn't get to say while your loved one was still living. Be as honest as you can be.

Have your loved one write a letter to you. What would this person say to you about the guilt and sadness you've been carrying around?

Ask what it would take for you to forgive yourself. Can you begin doing it? Say out loud to yourself, "I forgive you." Say it several times a day.

Remember that no one else can absolve your feelings of guilt—only you can do so, through the process of intentionally forgiving yourself.

When you've consciously learned all you can learn from this situation, and when you've made any amends you consider necessary, then it's time to let go of your guilt, to forgive yourself, and to move on.

Channel the energy of your guilt into a worthwhile project. Do good deeds in your loved one's honor.

Adapted from <http://www.griefhealingblog.com>

6 Week Grief and Loss Group

Our 6 week Grief and Loss Support Group will start again in September 2017. This group is for adults grieving the loss of someone significant in their lives and provides an opportunity to come together with others who have experienced the loss of a loved one. The group guides participants in understanding the uniqueness of their grief. Please note that this is not a therapeutic group; this group provides support, resources and education on the healing process. The group will meet on Thursdays from September 14, 2017 through October 12, 2017 from 4:00 to 6:00 pm at St. Luke's Anderson Campus, Medical Office Building, 1872 St. Luke's Boulevard, Easton, PA 18045. **Registration is required.** Mindy.Watson@sluhn.org or call Mindy at (484) 526-2314

Newly Bereaved Workshop

This one-time workshop is for those who have a lost a loved one within the past 1-3 months and will provide education on the first few weeks and months of grief following a death. We will cover understanding common grief reactions, coping strategies, self-care throughout the grief process and beyond, and the uniqueness of your grief experience. These workshops are offered on a bi-monthly basis. We will meet on **Wednesday, September 20, 2017 from 6:00 - 8:00 pm** at the Pricilla Payne Hurd Education Center, St. Luke's Hospital, Bethlehem Campus, 801 Ostrum Street, Bethlehem, PA 18015 (building is located in front of Priscilla Payne Hurd annex of the hospital). **Registration is required.** please call Mindy at (484)526-2314 or email Mindy.Watson@sluhn.org.

Open /Drop-in Support Groups

Our Drop-In groups are designed to offer continued support to bereaved individuals who have already attended grief and loss programs through St. Luke's Hospice. Drop-In groups afford participants the chance to continue with supportive services. This group is facilitated, but directed by group members in terms of content and discussion. We currently offer the following Drop-In Support Groups:

Easton: First Monday of every month from 4:00 -5:00 pm at St. Luke's Hospital-Anderson Campus, Medical Office Building (MOB), 1872 St. Luke's Blvd, Easton, PA 18045 in Conference Room A.

Quakertown: Second Monday of every month from 6:30-7:30 pm at St. Luke's Hospital-Quakertown Campus, 1021 Park Avenue, Quakertown, PA 18951 in Taylor B Conference room.

Bethlehem: Fourth Monday of every month from 6:00 - 7:00 pm at St. Luke's Pricilla Payne Hurd Education Center, St. Luke's Hospital, Bethlehem Campus, 801 Ostrum Street, Bethlehem, PA 18015 in Room 111.

Lehighton News :

Lehighton Open Group: We meet for our Drop In/Open Group on the **Third Monday of every month from 3:00 - 4:00 pm** at Dinkey Memorial Church, 1742 Dinkey Road, Lehighton, PA 18212. All members of the community who are in need of bereavement support are invited to attend.



It happened. It was awful.
You aren't perfect. That's
all there is. Don't confuse
your grief with guilt.

Veronica Roth

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 the Bereavement Office at (484) 526-2499 for referrals to other services.

Cancer Support Community of Lehigh Valley is a local non-profit organization providing emotional and social support to family members and caregivers. They offer support groups, educational workshops and mind/body classes in their Allentown, PA office. 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. www.thecompassionatefriends.org

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 610-837-7924.

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.

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 www.givinggriefavoice.com

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 social gatherings for widowed individuals to provide opportunities to connect with others in a positive, caring, and supportive environment. For more information, contact Sonja Handwerk at 610-297-0057 or soaringspiritslvpa@yahoo.com.

HALOS - CLC is for parents, grandparents and adult siblings who have experienced the loss of a child or sibling to suicide. The group meets every 4th Thursday from 6:30-8:30 pm at Hughes Library in Stroudsburg, PA. Register with Alice Keyes at (570) 236-1168

Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Center offers an Open Group on the 4th Wednesday of each month from 5:30-7:00 pm. Registration is required, contact Ariel at (610) 347-9988 or ariel@bradburysullivancenter.org. The Center is located at 522 W. Maple St., Allentown, PA 18101. There is no charge for the group.

GriefShare Groups are a faith-based 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.

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

GRASP - For families who have experienced a death due to substance use. Group meets every 3rd Monday of the month from 7-8:30 pm at 1st Presbyterian Church in Allentown, Room 118. Please register with Nancy Howe (484) 788-9440

Stepping Stones for Adolescents is a group for teens ages 11-16 that meets at Lehigh Valley Hospice for teen peer support. Call (610)969-0330 for more information.

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.

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