

# Comfort for the Grieving Heart

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Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

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*"I started missing you long before you were gone. I'll keep loving you long after the memories bring you back."*  
*Molly Fumia, author of Safe Passage*

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**PLEASE NOTE:** If you would like to be added or removed from our mailing list, or if you would prefer to receive an electronic copy, please contact Dawn at 484-526-2499.

My friend John's father lived in a nearby nursing home. He suffered from dementia, no longer recognizing his son, although John stay involved, visiting frequently and speaking often with the nursing staff. When the Covid-19 virus hit, all nursing home visits were put on hold and it took several weeks before remote visits were eventually offered. When John finally could see his dad through an iPad screen, his father appeared confused by the face he was viewing on another iPad screen. The visit was less than satisfying for John as well.

When his father started to decline, the facility allowed John to visit if he wore a face shield, surgical mask and a gown — but only one visit before death, not repeated visits. John decided not to go. His sister who lives in Arizona decided against traveling to Pennsylvania for several reasons. There was the potential of infection with air travel, her father might not even recognize her, and she would have been forced to stay in a hotel so as not to endanger other family members.

John's father died alone. Funerals weren't allowed at the time, so a Zoom session with immediate family was set up. Of course there were technical difficulties but beyond these glitches, there were no opportunities to gather and hug one another. The loss of so many familiar and comforting traditions seemed to deepen John's sense of loss. He felt very alone and heavily burdened.

In the world of grief counseling, this is disenfranchised grief. The term refers to any grief that goes unacknowledged or invalidated by social norms. And we have so many layers of this grief now. We have lost our safe and predictable world. Some of us are coping with grief after a loved one's death along with job and income loss and the inability to be geographically mobile. We've lost routines, activities and physical connection. For those grieving a family member who died from Covid-19, we may feel stigma or survivor guilt, the sudden, unexpected turn that led to death and deep sadness if our loved one died alone. If our loved one didn't die from Covid-19, we might experience a sense that our loss is diminished, that the loss is different because the world is focused on the pandemic instead of individual death. We might question the actual cause of death and not be able to get clear answers.

All of this contributes to our disconnection from mourning. On the next page we explore ways your experience may be unique to these times and find ways to comfort and connection. To say that these are unusual times is very much an understatement.

*Nannette Sell-Parry*

### Losing the Opportunity to Mourn Together

There are no traditions during this era of coronavirus. Each part of the funeral planning process that would have been done together is another opportunity for misstep and hurt when we are tender and vulnerable.

Not viewing the body is imposed on us rather than chosen by us. “They buried my dad” is mentioned instead of “We buried my dad.”

How will we have a service? Should we have a gathering soon or later, and if later, then when?

We have been denied the opportunity to gather for a wake, service, funeral or a meal after death. There are no flowers, funeral procession, familiar music and hymns nor laying eyes on friends from long ago or relatives who moved away. Casual friends from church, bowling league and co-workers may be unintentionally left out of the mourning process and with them go the memories. We mourn separately and it’s not fair.

Because the pandemic dictates physical distancing and masking, our social supports are limited. We are getting so much less than what we need. The pandemic is getting in the way. How do we cope with all this?

Each decision includes an aspect of how we are going to choose to manage the novelty of the situation without the guiding principles of tradition.

Choosing to feel, choosing to just sit with these multiple and confusing feelings rather than acting on them takes courage. Let me say that again. Just feeling emotion takes courage.

Name it,  
breathe,  
feel it,  
breathe.

Sitting with the feeling in the moment is a practice of mindfulness. Observe the feeling build, wash over and then recede.

Collectively we are grieving the world that once was and must find new ways of connecting and conversing so that honoring, healing and reflecting can be possible. Here are some ideas to try:

**Find online bereavement support** – Look for a group that is hosted by a professional moderator such as a grief counselor, therapist or social worker. Read the rules on the website for participation and give it a try.

**Give self hugs.** Put your arms around yourself and squeeze. Give yourself or a pet the physical touch that you would have gotten from others. Science shows that this simple gesture has an impact on the brain similar to a hug from someone else.

**Spend time outdoors.** Get together with a fellow griever to walk, bike ride or sit outside at a distance from one another. Find ways to be in the company of others even if it means gathering and socializing in new ways.

**Attend an online candlelight vigil.** Go to [letsreimagine.org](https://letsreimagine.org), a website hosting monthly virtual candlelight vigils to honor the memory of those who have died from Covid-19.

**Read daily meditations.** Since grieving is a daily experience, adopt the practice of reading an uplifting message each day. Some sources for these meditations include:

[Grieving the Loss of a Loved One](#) by Lorene Hanley Duquin

[Safe Passage: Words to Help the Grieving](#) by Molly Fumia

[Grief One Day at a Time: 365 Meditations to Help You Heal After Loss](#) by Alan Wolfelt, PhD

[Hope and Healing for Transcending Loss](#) by Ashley Davis Bush, LCSW

### Gearing Up for Change

Our support groups and workshop offerings have been on hold in compliance with CDC and Pennsylvania state guidelines. Some groups will resume online in the coming weeks and months.

**Individual support:** Our three grief counselors are available by cell phone for video chats to provide support and information to you. Names and phone numbers to reach us are listed on page 1 of this newsletter.

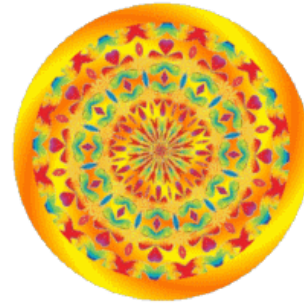
**Video Library:** Coming to our web site soon is a library of resources that you will soon be able to view from the comfort of your home. These videos provide information about the grieving and mourning process and ways to care for yourself during these tender times.

**Drop-In Groups:** These groups enable participants the chance to receive and provide support in a collaborative environment. They are facilitated by a grief counselor and participants are invited to suggest topics for discussion. Our Brodheadsville group will now resume on the third Tuesday of the month from 1:30-3 pm at the Western Pocono Community Library, 131 Pilgrim Way, Brodheadsville 18322. We meet in the first floor community room but participants must enter the building from the side front door, not the main entrance. All must wear masks and maintain a 6-foot distance during the meeting. For more information, contact Jean Francis at (484) 225-9269.

Two other Drop in Groups are occurring remotely. Tuesdays at 2 PM starting August 11th. For information contact Ally Becker.

Mondays a 7pm starting August 3rd. For information contact Tara George.

PLEASE JOIN US



### Death is Nothing at All

*By Henry Scott Holland*

Death is nothing at all.  
I have only slipped away to the next room.  
I am I and you are you.  
Whatever we were to each other,  
That, we still are.

Call me by my old familiar name.  
Speak to me in the easy way  
which you always used.  
Put no difference into your tone.  
Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.

Laugh as we always laughed  
at the little jokes we enjoyed together.  
Play, smile, think of me. Pray for me.  
Let my name be ever the household word  
that it always was.  
Let it be spoken without effect.  
Without the trace of a shadow on it.

Life means all that it ever meant.  
It is the same that it ever was.  
There is absolute unbroken continuity.  
Why should I be out of mind  
because I am out of sight?

I am but waiting for you.  
For an interval.  
Somewhere. Very near.  
Just around the corner.  
All is well.

## Additional Places to Find Support and Share Your Story

**Below is a list of free bereavement services in the area. Because of physical distancing, many of these resources can only be accessed online. Please contact our bereavement department at 484-526-2499 if you are in need of additional resources.**

### **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](mailto: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](http://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 610-515-3526) and Quakertown chapter (484-408-7314).

**Doylestown Hospital Hospice** offers a variety of support groups and programs that change seasonally. Visit [www.dhospice.com](http://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.givinggriefavoic.com](http://www.givinggriefavoic.com) to learn more. Please be sure to 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](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://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.

### **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](http://www.karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement)