Coping with Grief & Social Distancing

In these strange times, when the entire world is impacted by the Coronavirus, people grieving a loss are challenged to become more creative in finding the support they need. When a death happens now, there may be even greater confusion. People may think they “aren’t allowed” to have funerals given the emphasis on social distancing. Yet there are so many ways to celebrate a life and provide a respectful farewell during these times. Webcasting, digital options and perhaps a private viewing while practicing social distancing are but some of the possibilities.

As a grief counselor, one of the most common concerns bereaved individuals talk about is whether they are ‘grieving correctly.’ In most cases, as they talk with a counselor or others who have also had a loss, they come to realize how they are grieving is more common than they thought. It’s the situation that is unusual — they never lost their spouse, sibling, best friend or child before. How would they know what that would be like? But the key point here is that grieving people usually discover this reassurance as they interact with others, be it a counselor or another bereaved person.

So how do you do that during this time of social distancing? Well, there are a variety of options available to you. In light of the Coronavirus outbreak, the Pathways Center has transitioned all face-to-face support groups into virtual support groups. One of the definitions of “virtual” is ‘almost or nearly as described.’ We have been pleasantly surprised to discover how willing people have been to try something they have never done before. The feedback at the conclusion of the group sessions has been extremely positive. In one group a woman said she actually preferred the virtual group, from the comfort of her home, rather than driving 30 minutes to attend a face-to-face meeting. While virtual support groups will not replace face-to-face groups in the future, for the time being they will help to provide needed support in a safe and effective way.

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Leaning In

Though new growth and beauty may be blossoming everywhere you turn, your spirits may not be in tune with the warmth and gaiety of early summer. Perhaps your heart feels heavy because a loved one is missing from your life. Kahlil Gibran, said to be one of the world’s bestselling poets, reminds us that sorrow is the other side of joy. In the current pandemic environment we are seeing similar reminders and reassurances to look beyond the present situation to know life won’t continue the way it currently is. There would be no sadness or pain, had you not first felt the joy of your loved one’s presence and the strength of that relationship. Sorrow is connected to joy as surely as death is connected to birth. You cannot have one without the other.

At times you may have blocked out some of the more painful feelings. This might have helped you survive the difficult moments. But avoiding what hurts can leave you unprepared and unsure of how to cope when faced with the unbelievable reminders of your loss. You may not realize that your feelings are normal, and that you are a resilient person who can survive great loss. Moving toward the pain of loss may not be easy, but it is the path toward healing and growth. A bereaved friend once shared with me an image of grief she drew from a white-water rafting experience. Several new rafters were afraid to row toward the rocks. Instead, they paddled away from the rapids and their whole raft capsized. The guide helped them understand that to navigate the rough waters they had to paddle toward and lean into the rapids.

Be patient with yourself. It is difficult to allow yourself to feel what you may have spent time trying to avoid. Try to trust that if you feel the sorrow of your grief, you will, in time, come to know joy again.

~ Patti Anewalt, Director

“When you are sorrowful, look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.”

~ Kahlil Gibran

Pathways Center counselors recognize that grief is experienced by the entire family – children, teens and adults. Amid serious illness and death, children and teens often are overlooked, yet their needs are significant. Three, six-week Family Support series are offered throughout the school year in the Bob & Joy Allen Coping Kids & Teens Wing of the Pathways Center for Grief & Loss. Families gather for a light supper before each group session. Children and teens meet in peer support groups and participate in activities to help them cope with a death, while adults learn how to manage the challenges of supporting grieving teens and children. Families meet with a counselor to complete an assessment prior to attending to determine if the group will be helpful for your child(ren).

There is no charge for the Coping Kids & Teens program due to the generous support of the community.
Getting Through Special Days

These special days may once have filled you with eager anticipation; now you may feel anxious about them after your loss. Consider the following suggestions as these special days draw closer.

- **Tell others what you need.** Let them know about special dates, so they are aware of possible rough times. Suggest how they can support you.

- **Reflect on what you want and need to do.** If you take the time to think about the day, it will probably become clearer as to what you’d like to do.

- **The anticipation can be worse than the actual day.** Do you find yourself with such negative thoughts as “I can’t handle this?” Try changing these thoughts into something more positive, perhaps “I need to stay focused on the present; I can get through today.” You might be surprised how helpful this change in thinking can be.

- **What would you have done on that day?** Can you revise that same tradition to help you heal?

- **Visit the cemetery or other places that remind you of your loved one.** As time goes on these visits become less painful and more comforting.

- **Consider a new tradition.**

It can be helpful to plan activities or rituals to remember and connect with the person who died. Expect that it may be difficult but you might be relieved to discover moments of healing or comfort on that special day.

~Patti Anewalt, Director

Grief Support for Overdose Loss

In our efforts to support bereaved individuals grieving a loss from a drug overdose, we have launched a closed Facebook Group titled **HERO (Heal, Endure, Restore after Overdose).** This group provides a safe environment for those grieving to raise questions, express feelings, and support one another along their grief journeys. It is a peer-to-peer group for mutual support, facilitated by the Pathways Center’s Master’s-level grief counselors. (Please note, that you will be prompted to answer three questions when you ask to join the group. These questions must be answered before being accepted into the group.)

The Pathways Center also offers face-to-face peer support by hosting a monthly **GRASP (Grief Recovery After Substance Passing) group for those grieving a loss from overdose.** Call Marjorie Paradise at (717) 951-2720 for more information.

And, new for 2020, we will hold a commemorative event on Overdose Awareness Day on August 31. Dr. Mitchell Crawford will share his personal story about the death of his younger sister due to a heroin overdose and talk about his current position as the Director of Addiction Services for WellSpan Philhaven.

Call us at (717) 391-2413 or (800) 924-7610 with questions or if you would like more information.
Many people grieving find it helpful to hear others’ experiences with a loss after death. It is reassuring to realize what you are going through is shared by others. Our groups focus on grief education and support.

The Pathways Center for Grief & Loss and Hospice & Community Care are taking all necessary precautions for the health and safety of our patients and families, staff, volunteers and visitors related to the Coronavirus outbreak. Support groups will be held via Zoom during May and June. Contact the Pathways Center at (717) 391-2413 or (800) 924-7610 to request the log-in address or phone number. Since Zoom is not limited by geographical location, there are a variety of options to choose from.

**Loss Specific Support Groups — Registration required**

Groups are led by Master’s-level counselors and volunteers who have experienced the same type of loss. They provide time to share experiences and ask questions. Groups are designed for those within the first two years following the death of a loved one.

**Virtual Gatherings for May**

**Coping with the Loss of a Spouse or Companion**

- Wednesday, MAY 6, 6:30–8:00 p.m.
- Tuesday, MAY 19, 2:00–3:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, MAY 19, 6:30–8:00 p.m.
- Tuesday, MAY 26, 2:00–3:30 p.m.
- Wednesday, JUNE 3, 6:30–8:00 p.m.
- Tuesday, JUNE 16, 2:00–3:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, JUNE 16, 6:30–8:00 p.m.
- Tuesday, JUNE 23, 2:00–3:30 p.m.

**Coping with the Loss of a Parent or Sibling**

- Tuesday, MAY 5, 6:30-8:00 p.m.
- Tuesday, JUNE 2, 6:30-8:00 p.m.

Please visit our website at [www.hospiceandcommunitycare.org/grief-and-loss/adult/](http://www.hospiceandcommunitycare.org/grief-and-loss/adult/) for updated information about support groups in JULY.

**Sidelines by the Coronavirus**

Are you struggling with the fact that, lately, you have been more consumed with what is happening due to the Coronavirus than you are with the loss of your loved one? If so, you are not alone – most of the people we talk with who are grieving talk about this as soon as our conversation begins. What had been consuming your time and your thoughts little more than a month ago related to your grief has been replaced with a focus on the news and feelings of isolation. You have essentially lost the life you once knew, leaving you reeling from feelings of helplessness and grieving the loss of your “normal.” Your world had already turned upside down by the death of your loved one. Contact us at (717) 391-2413 to learn how we can help you on your grief journey.

Call us at (717) 391-2413 or (800) 924-7610 with questions or if you would like more information.
We Are Here for You

After our grief counselors talk with someone on the phone or see them in a support group for the first time, they often say they wish they had reached out to us sooner. Many bereaved individuals know they “need something” but are uncertain what that is. Call us here at the Pathways Center. As you talk with one of our counselors, they will help you figure out what might be most helpful to you. It might be scheduling periodic phone calls with the counselor. It might be checking out our online bereavement educational videos. It might be a virtual support group. Some people worry they will break down and cry in a group. Yet when they do attend, they are usually surprised to find it was more helpful than they thought it would be. The support groups, regardless of whether they are through Zoom or face-to-face, provide a safe place to express emotions you may not have felt comfortable sharing with family or friends. So consider calling us and letting us help you discern what you need. Most people say they are glad they did because they realize that they feel less alone.

Call us at (717) 391-2413 or (800) 924-7610 with questions or if you would like more information.
Calendar of Events

Social Dine-Out Options

Do you feel as though the opportunities to socialize have changed after the death of your loved one? Does it seem as though the only people who truly understand what you are going through are others who are also bereaved? The Pathways Center offers a variety of social options to choose from. Each participant pays for their own meal. These gatherings are facilitated by trained bereavement volunteers who have also experienced loss in the past.

Due to the Coronavirus outbreak, we have canceled all groups scheduled during May and June.

Please visit our website at www.hospiceandcommunitycare.org/grief-and-loss/ for updated information about Social Dine-Out Options in JULY.

Spanish Support

Grief Support in Spanish
The Pathways Center for Grief & Loss’ bilingual Bereavement Counselor, Deborah Gonzalez, MSW, is available to any bereaved individuals who speak Spanish. Call (717) 391-2440 to leave a confidential message in Spanish or if you wish to receive our Spanish newsletter.

Consejería de Duelo En Español
El Centro De Pathways para Duelo y Pérdidas cuenta con una Consejera de Duelo bilingüe, Deborah Gonzalez, MSW, quien está disponible para reunirse con personas que están sufriendo la pérdida de un ser querido. Puede llamar al (717) 391-2440 y dejar un mensaje confidencial en Español o si desea recibir el bulletin Caminos Hacia La Esperanza.

Call us at (717) 391-2413 or (800) 924-7610 with questions or if you would like more information.
Calendar of Events

Other Options

GRASP
(Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing)

Tuesday, MAY 12, 6:30–8:00 p.m.
Tuesday, JUNE 9, 6:30–8:00 p.m.

This monthly group helps provide sources of help, compassion, and understanding for families or individuals who have had a loved one die as a result of substance abuse or addiction. **Pre-registration for new attendees is required.** Due to the Coronavirus, these groups will be held via Zoom in May and June. To register or to request the log-in address or telephone number for Zoom, contact Marjorie Paradise at mparadis810@comcast.net or (717) 951-2720. Visit our website at www.hospiceandcommunitycare.org/grief-and-loss/ for updated information on groups in July.

Remembering Our Mothers

As a result of the Coronavirus outbreak, this year’s Remembering Our Mothers Breakfast has been canceled. Individuals who have pre-registered and made payment to attend will be contacted with their registration fee to be refunded. We hope to see you next year!

Connect with other women who have lost their mother through our closed Facebook group — search for “Remembering Our Mothers event” and ask to join. Note, that you will be prompted to answer three questions when you ask to join the group. These questions must be answered before being accepted into the group.

Coping with Grief & Social Distancing

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Phone support has always been and will continue to be available. You can talk with a bereavement counselor any time, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m. Perhaps you now have more time to explore what is ‘out there’ in terms of bereavement websites or Facebook support groups. The Pathways Center offers two closed Facebook groups — one for women grieving the loss of their mother and another named **HERO** (Heal, Endure, Restore after Overdose) loss support group. The Pathways Center website also offers a variety of grief resources including online bereavement videos, a wide array of handouts on different types and aspects of loss as well as other suggested websites.

**Check us out, you are not alone.**
www.hospiceandcommunitycare.org/grief-and-loss/

Call us at (717) 391-2413 or (800) 924-7610 with questions or if you would like more information.
Also Available Through the Pathways Center

Workshops, in-services and trainings are available for those who support the bereaved. Are you seeking bereavement support outside of South Central Pennsylvania? Visit www.nhpco.org or call the Pathways Center to find support closer to your home. Contact the Pathways Center for more information about how we could be a resource to you, your organization or someone you know.