Coping with Grief and Social Distancing

In these strange times, when the entire world continues to be 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 still many ways to celebrate a life and provide a respectful farewell during these times. Webcasting, digital options or 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 begin to understand that the way they are grieving is more common than they realized. It is 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? 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. For the past year, the Pathways Center transitioned all of its face-to-face support groups into virtual, online support groups. We have found it so rewarding to see people successfully try something they perhaps never would have previously considered, when it comes to online support. The feedback at the conclusion of the group sessions has been extremely positive. Some participants say they prefer the online option, since it can be done from the comfort of their own home, rather than getting in their car and driving to attend a face-to-face meeting. We look forward to being able to once again offer groups in person. Yet for the time being, online groups provide needed support in
The Coping Kids & Teens program provides individual sessions for children and teens impacted by the serious illness or death of a loved one. Sessions continue to be offered via Zoom, however, we are slowly beginning to meet with children and families in small groups again in person. Call the Pathways Center for more information or to set up an appointment.

**Individual Grief Support**

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“The counselors with the Coping Kids & Teens program went above and beyond at the start of Covid-19 in March, 2020. They did Zoom sessions with parents and kids and they dropped off projects for the kids. They are amazing and the program is great!”

—Parent of a grieving child
Getting Through Special Days

“How can I face Mother’s Day when my mother is no longer living?”

“How will I get past his graduation day when our son, who died so suddenly, should have been among those graduating this year?”

“How will I get through her birthday, our anniversary, or that wedding?”

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 would like to do, or not do.

The anticipation can be worse than the actual day. Do you find yourself with some negative thoughts such as “I can’t handle this?” Try changing these thoughts into something more positive, perhaps “I need to stay focused on the present; it is just 24 hours, I can get through it.” You might be surprised how helpful this change in thinking can be.

What would you have done on that day? Is there a way to 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 will 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.

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 spring and early summer. Perhaps your heart feels heavy because your loved one is missing from your life. Kahlil Gibran, said to be one of the world’s best-selling 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 in 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.

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Calendar of Events

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.

Groups will be held virtually via Zoom until further notice.

Contact the Pathways Center to discuss support options with a bereavement counselor who will also provide the appropriate log-in information.

Are you uncertain about attending a virtual grief group?

In a recent survey, nearly 90% of bereaved individuals felt the virtual Zoom format provided a supportive group experience.

Virtual 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. These sessions will be held via Zoom. Contact the Pathways Center to discuss with a bereavement counselor who will also provide the log-in information.

Coping with the Loss of a Child
(of any age)

Wednesday, MAY 26, 6:30–8:00 p.m.
Wednesday, JUNE 23, 6:30–8:00 p.m.

Coping with the Loss of a Parent or Sibling

Tuesday, MAY 4, 6:30–8:00 p.m.
Tuesday, JUNE 1, 6:30–8:00 p.m.

Coping with the Loss of a Spouse or Companion

Wednesday, MAY 5, 6:30–8:00 p.m.
Tuesday, MAY 11, 6:30–8:00 p.m.
Tuesday, MAY 18, 2:00–3:30 p.m.
Tuesday, MAY 25, 2:00–3:30 p.m.
Wednesday, JUNE 2, 6:30–8:00 p.m.
Tuesday, JUNE 8, 6:30–8:00 p.m.
Tuesday, JUNE 15, 2:00–3:30 p.m.
Tuesday, JUNE 22, 2:00–3:30 p.m.

The following is a quote from a recent support group participant:

“Just hearing my reactions were normal was so helpful!”

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

Virtual Support Group Series – Registration required

Newly Bereaved Program (3-week series)

Wednesdays, MAY 12, 19 and 26
2:00-3:30 p.m.

Tuesdays, JUNE 15, 22 and 29
6:30-8:00 p.m.

Wednesdays, JULY 14, 21 and 28
2:00-3:30 p.m.

(Registration deadline: one week prior to the start of the group)

If your loss was recent, this series provides an overview of common grief responses and will help you to begin to identify coping tools. Space is limited; registration required. Call to discuss with a bereavement counselor to determine if the group will meet your needs. These groups will be held virtually via Zoom.

The following is a quote from a recent support group participant:

“The handouts the counselor shared were very informative in pointing out the various ways a person may grieve.”

Other Options

GRASP
(Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing)

Tuesday, MAY 11, 6:30–8:00 p.m.

Tuesday, JUNE 8, 6:30–8:00 p.m.

(Pre-registration for NEW attendees is required.)

This monthly group provides 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.

For more information about location, Zoom details, or to register, contact Marjorie Paradise at mparadise810@comcast.net or (717) 951-2720.

REMEMBERING OUR MOTHERS
(an interactive virtual event)

Saturday, MAY 8, 9:30–11:00 am

(Registration deadline: April 30)

This annual Mother’s Day commemorative event provides women whose mothers have died a time to remember, honor and celebrate their mothers’ lives. Join us virtually through Zoom to hear Debbie Miley, Hospice & Community Care chaplain and ordained pastor in the United Church of Christ, present “Still My Mother.” There will be opportunities for discussion with other participants. Space is limited; registration required. Call the Pathways Center to speak with a bereavement counselor who will provide the log-in information.

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

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.

Consejeria 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.

Individual Support Sessions

Sometimes it can be helpful to meet individually with a bereavement counselor. We are gradually beginning to offer in-person support sessions again in Mount Joy or York, adhering to all of the Center for Disease Control recommended guidelines. Phone support has always been and will continue to be available. You may talk with a bereavement counselor any time, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Call the Pathways Center for more information or to set up an appointment.

Online Grief Videos

Explore our online library of educational videos that focus on Composing Life Out of Loss to help you better understand your grief. Visit www.PathwaysThroughGrief.org then ‘Grief Resources’ then ‘Online Grief Education and Support’. What you need. When you need it.

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a safe and effective way. Our virtual groups have been so well received that we do plan to continue to offer some even when we resume the in-person option. If you have not yet tried an online group, we encourage you to consider that possibility.

We are gradually beginning to offer in-person visits again, adhering to all of the Center for Disease Control recommended guidelines. Phone support has always been and will continue to be available. You may talk with a bereavement counselor any time, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Perhaps you have more time to explore what is available in terms of bereavement websites or Facebook support groups. The Pathways Center offers two closed Facebook groups – ‘Remembering Our Mothers Event’ for women grieving the loss of their mother and HERO (Heal, Endure, Restore after Overdose) for people who have lost a loved one to overdose. The Pathways Center website also offers a variety of grief resources including online bereavement videos, handouts on different types and aspects of loss, as well as other suggested websites. Check us out, you are not alone. www.PathwaysThroughGrief.org

~Patti Anewalt, Director

Call us at (717) 391-2413 or (800) 924-7610 with questions or if you would like more information.
Is it normal for my daughter to experience bad dreams after the death of her grandfather?

Like adults, many children have trouble sleeping after someone they care about has died. Encourage your daughter to tell you about her dreams and then listen for “themes” in them. Although what happens in the dream may not make sense, often the theme, and the feeling it leaves her with, can tie in with what is going on in her daily life.

When children experience a loss, they often worry that someone else they are close to will also die. They feel more vulnerable as they realize that things happen that they, and you, cannot control. What your daughter needs now is lots of hugs and reassurance from the adults around her who are there for her each day.

Your daughter’s love for her grandfather leaves her with many confusing feelings now that he has died. Reading with her will help her talk about how she is feeling, as will drawing or other expressive art activities. If she seems uncomfortable talking about her feelings, it will help for you to share your own fond memories of her grandfather, as well as the feelings you have experienced since his death.

Children look to adults for guidance as to how they should behave. If you set an example, she is likely to follow. As you provide comfort and reassurance, and model how to cope, the frequency and intensity of her dreams should lessen. In time, she will discover what comforts her and helps her adjust to this significant loss.

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 so many reminders of your loss, perhaps everywhere you turn. 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 people who were new to white-water rafting were afraid to row toward the rocks. Instead, they paddled away from the rapids and their rafts 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.

“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
Also Available Through the Pathways Center

Workshops, in-services and trainings are available for those who support the bereaved. Are you seeking grief 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.

The Pathways Center

You will receive the Pathways newsletter free of charge for 16 months. If you would like to continue to receive this newsletter after that time, call the Pathways Center.

The Pathways Center for Grief & Loss is a program of Hospice & Community Care. The Pathways Center offers the area’s most comprehensive programs and services for individuals in the community affected by the serious illness or death of someone significant in their lives.

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