

Bereavement Services

Talking With Others After Losing a Loved One

“That was the hard thing about grief, and the grieving. They spoke another language, and the words we knew always fell short of what we wanted them to say.”

– Sarah Dessen, *The Truth About Forever*

After we have lost a loved one, it seems that everyone is compelled to ask how we are doing. Coworkers, friends, acquaintances and members of our faith community all ask about our well-being. “How are you?” is no longer a greeting; it becomes an emotionally charged question.

There are several reasons that it is often difficult to talk with others. First, it can be nearly impossible to find words to express how we are doing. After losing someone we love, we have many complex thoughts, feelings and experiences that simply cannot be captured by words.

Additionally, social convention often comes into play. Most of us value being polite and considerate, and we want to respond in a way that will not hurt other people’s feelings or make them feel uncomfortable. This can be difficult as death and grief are emotionally charged topics, and talking about them often elicits painful and distressing feelings.

Finally, others may respond to our grief with clumsy or insensitive comments. Among the most hurtful of these might be, “I know just how you feel;” “You are lucky you have other children;” or “You can always remarry.” When people make comments like this, they are often attempting to make us feeling better and console us. However, they are not aware that comments like these dismiss and invalidate our feelings of loss.



Activity Suggestions

- Communicate with your family and friends about what you need. Tell them if you just want them to listen. Let them know if you are not ready to be social yet. Your family and friends need to be taught how to support you, and it is often a difficult learning process for them as well.
- Try to give your family and friends some grace. They may say some hurtful comments, but they are often coming from a well-intentioned place. Our family and friends may not have had a significant loss before, and they may simply be ill-equipped to know how to respond. Understand that your family and friends are not going to always meet our expectations. Try to grant them some forgiveness for not knowing what we are going through, for saying insensitive things, or for their clumsy efforts to offer consolation.
- Perhaps one of the best ways we can care for ourselves is by finding someone we can talk to freely. Your family and friends are certainly sources of support; however, it may be beneficial to also find someone outside your immediate circle. For example, it may be helpful to find someone who is comfortable discussing death and who will not try to change how you are feeling. This may be a lot to expect from only your family and friends. You may find it beneficial to find a religious leader, grief counselor or therapist in addition to your family and friends.

The death of a loved one has a significant impact on our lives.

We cannot avoid experiencing the intense grief that we feel, but we can learn how to live with the changes that occur as a result of the loss.

UnityPoint Hospice Bereavement Services walks alongside you as you experience loss following the death of a loved one. Grief is not about getting over a loss; it is about the process of adjusting to the significant changes from the loss. We provide space for you to talk about your loved one and how his/her death impacts numerous aspects of your life.



UnityPoint Hospice

Telling Your Grief Story

“Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak knits up the o’er wrought heart and bids it break.”

– William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

Human beings are story tellers. We spend a significant amount of our social time telling stories about the events that occur in our daily lives. Cave drawings, songs, novels, biographies, religious texts, movies, history – these are some of the ways that we record and share our experiences. Stories can make us laugh or cry; they can entertain or teach us. Story telling is part of being human.

When someone we love dies, we often need to tell others what happened. Who died? Was the death sudden or expected? What caused the death? What did we say or do or think when the death occurred? Where did the death occur? We find ourselves telling and re-telling the details and events, both to ourselves and to others. For many, telling the story just feels right, and it may help us move forward in our grief journey.

William Worden, who has studied and written extensively about grief, believes that telling the story is part of the first task in grieving. According to Worden, we first need to accept the reality of the loss. We come to accept the reality by telling what happened, again and again.

Meaning-making is what takes place when we tell not only what happened, but why it happened, and how we were affected by what happened. Meaning-making can be an important step in grieving. We need to tell ourselves and others why the death happened, how it has changed us and how it may affect our future.

One of the challenges we may face when we grieve is finding a safe place to tell our story. We may often hear the message that we need to “get over” our loss, or “let it go and move on.” If telling our story is an important part of our grieving, we may need to find a place where others listen patiently and do not judge. A religious leader, counselor, hospice bereavement coordinator, or a support group can provide such a place.

Activity Suggestions

- Consider telling your story to a trusted friend. It may be helpful to set ground rules if you do so. For example, let your friend know if you prefer that he or she simply listen, as opposed to offering advice.
- Contact your hospice bereavement coordinator, religious leader or counselor. They have experience listening to people’s stories and exploring meanings and insights.
- Try journaling. Find a notebook or journal that reminds you of your loved one.
- Watch a movie about someone who has experienced a death. Two recent movies that incorporate this theme are *Up* and *Philomena*.
- Read *Tear Soup* by Pat Schweibert.



One-on-One Meetings

Meet individually with your bereavement coordinator to share the story of your loved one and how your loss has impacted you. The location can be your house, our office, or at a neutral location such as a coffee shop.

Support Groups

UnityPoint Hospice offers a number of different support groups that address people’s unique loss and grieving style. A complete listing of our groups is provided on the enclosed flyer.

For more information, please contact one of the bereavement coordinators listed below.

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