

Bereavement Services

Loneliness

“I keep finding myself stifled by the company of others and then crippled by loneliness when I leave them.”
– Veronica Roth, *Allegiant*

Many people state that feeling lonely is one of the most difficult aspects of their grief. They miss their loved one, and their world feels so different and insecure since experiencing such a drastic change. Loneliness does not necessarily describe someone who is physically alone; rather, loneliness describes an emotional state in which we feel disconnected. Someone can be in a room with a group of people and still feel lonely. On the other hand, someone can be physically alone without feeling lonely because he or she is enjoying his or her own company. Loneliness is a state of isolation in which we feel disjointed from others and ourselves, and this can occur whether we are by ourselves or with others.

Even if you have supportive family and friends, you may still feel a strong sense of loneliness. There are a couple reasons this occurs. First, you have just lost someone with whom you had regular contact, and you are going to feel your loved one's absence during the times that you were accustomed to spending together. Perhaps you called your loved one on a routine basis, and now that time feels empty without your regular phone call. Or maybe you lived with your loved one, and now all of your daily activities feel different without them around for company. People feel lonely after their loved one's death because they miss the time and activities they had with their loved one.

Another reason people feel lonely is because it is often difficult to engage in the same activities and hobbies that they had prior to their loss. Because we feel so sad, we do not have the energy to engage at the same level we did before. Additionally, the activity or hobby may not bring us the same joy that it had previously, and this can feel disconcerting. Feeling different and not having our usual routine will contribute to feelings of loneliness and disconnection.

Finally, people often feel lonely when they grieve because it is so difficult for others to understand what they are going through. Our relationship with our loved ones is unique, and no one can grasp how difficult the loss is for us. It can even be difficult to connect with friends and family who are also grieving the same person. Everyone has a different relationship with the deceased, and this means that everyone's grief will look different. It can feel lonely to not have anyone understand how the loss of your loved one affects you in particular.

Activity Suggestions

- Listen to yourself. Sometimes it will be necessary for you to say “no” to certain activities because you are not ready to be as social or active as you were before.
- On the other hand, sometimes it is necessary to challenge yourself to be more social and active than you want to be. Give yourself permission to leave social activities early in the event that you realize you are not ready.
- Journal. This helps you connect with yourself and how you are feeling.
- Talk to your loved one out loud.
- Connect with other people who have had a similar loss. People often express that they feel close to the people they meet in support groups because they understand what it feels like.

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.



Guilt

“Every human is guilty of all the good that he or she did not do.”

– Voltaire

People often express guilt after their loved one dies. I have heard people express guilt about things that they *could* have done:

- “I wish I had spent more time with her.”
- “I wish I had told him how I feel.”
- “I wish I would have realized sooner that she was sick.”

People also express guilt about things they feel like they *shouldn't* have done:

- “I wish I had not fought with him.”
- “I wish I had not left her side.”
- “I wish I had not taken him for granted.”

It is understandable that we feel guilt after our loved ones die. We want to do what is best for them, and it is easy to focus on the areas where we fell short. We wonder if things would have turned out differently if only we had done something different. Perhaps

our loved one would be alive if we had realized that he or she was sick earlier. Or maybe we would not feel so sad if we had appreciated every minute we had together when he or she was alive. We dislike that we are no longer with our loved one, so we ruminate on the past to think about how we could have changed the final outcome.

Thinking about the past and feeling guilty is often our way of searching for explanations. We want to understand *why* our loved one died and *why* we have to live without him or her. This causes guilt because we realize that we are not in complete control, *even though we wish that we could be*. We are not in control of life and death; our loved ones die no matter how much we want them to stay with us. Additionally, we are not in control of the past; we are not perfect, and there will be moments where we fell short in our relationships. We feel guilt because we do not want these things to have happened, so we rack our brains trying to understand how we could have done something differently.

It is understandable if you feel guilty. However, try to remember that you are not perfect, you are not all-knowing, and you did the best you could. Remind yourself that death is complex; try to have some patience and grace with yourself.

Activity Suggestions

- Admit to yourself that you feel guilty. Simply saying, “I feel guilty” lessens the power that your guilt has over you.
- Try to balance your guilt by thinking of moments when you were supportive and compassionate with your loved one.
- Remember that you are not perfect and that your loved one was also not perfect. Remind yourself that you did the best you could with what you knew at the time.

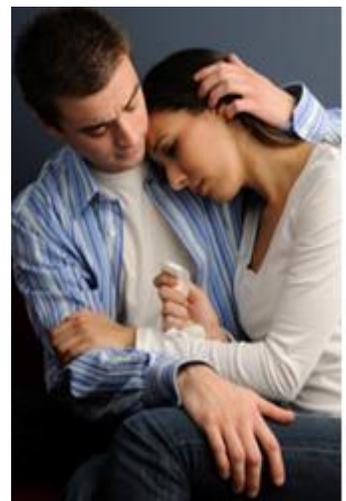


One-on-One Meetings

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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