

# Bereavement Services

## Value of Solitude in Grief

**“In solitude, the mind gains strength and learns to lean upon itself.”**

**– Laurence Sterne**

When we lose someone we love, our friends and family often worry about us spending too much time alone. They visit us at home, invite us to dinner, and encourage us to stay busy. Their support demonstrates compassion, but it can also mean they are trying to protect us from feeling our grief. The implicit message is that if we stay busy and surrounded by people, we will not dwell too heavily on what we lost.

There certainly *is* value in surrounding ourselves with activities and people we love, but there is *also* significant value in spending time alone when we grieve. First, it does not matter if we spend time alone or with people; we *will* feel our grief. We cannot hide from the thoughts and feelings that come after we lose someone we love. Second, there are significant benefits to intentionally spending time alone.

One of the benefits of solitude while grieving is that you are able to control how you spend your time. You can cry, talk to your loved one, go on walks, or do activities around your house. You are able to focus on what *you* need for your grief during that specific period of time. When we are with other people, there is a part of us concentrating on the other person's needs and how they are experiencing the time together. However, when you spend time in solitude, you are able to concentrate only on what you need. This time to concentrate on your needs is essential for grief because it allows you to process your thoughts and feelings in the way that is most beneficial to you.

Another benefit is that you are able to have time to become reacquainted with yourself. By spending time alone, you are able to learn about yourself, your needs, and your interests. Most importantly, you are able to learn how to advocate and satisfy those needs and interests in the absence of your loved one. Our loved ones play a significant role in satisfying our need for companionship and social activities. We need time alone to learn 1) what our needs/interests are; and 2) how we are going to meet those needs without our loved one. We can learn how to meet those needs through ourselves, our existing support system, or we may need to seek a new community for some of our needs.



## Activity Suggestions

Set aside specific time each day for solitude. Perhaps it is before you go to bed, or maybe it is after you eat lunch. Even if you have a demanding schedule, try to find a little time during the day that is yours. Use this designated time to reflect upon your loss and how it affects you. Think about what your needs and interests are, as well as what you can do to advocate and satisfy those needs. Consider writing everything down as seeing it on paper can help you sort through everything.

## 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.

# The Many Layers of Loss

**“One by one, drops fell from her eyes like they were on an assembly line – gather, fall, slide... each one commemorating something she had lost. Hope. Faith. Confidence. Pride. Security. Trust. Independence. Joy. Beauty. Freedom. Innocence.”**

**– Lisi Harrison, *Monster High***

Sometimes people ask me, “Why is this so hard? I don’t understand why this is affecting me so much.” My heart goes out to these individuals who want so badly to feel better, yet they find that they are still struggling so much. Losing someone we love *is* difficult, and it *is* going to take longer than anyone can imagine to feel “okay” again.

One of the primary reasons grief is so difficult is because there are many layers of loss. Not only do we physically lose our loved one, but there are also additional losses we feel. For example, we often lose our routine when we lose our loved one. Perhaps you were caring for your loved one in your home, and now that he or she is gone, your time feels empty. Or maybe you had a routine of calling your loved one on a regular basis, and now you struggle to fill those time slots. We lose our routines and patterns when we lose our loved one; it is an additional layer of loss.

Another layer is the loss of future dreams. When we imagine the future, we usually picture our loved one with us. We think about spending the holidays with them, and we dream about vacations that we will take with them. We imagine celebrating milestones together: birthdays, anniversaries and graduations. Consequently, when we lose our loved one, we lose those dreams. We lose what *could* have been, and we lose the dream of *what we thought should be*. Realizing the loss of those dreams and imagining a different type of future is a significant component of the grief journey.

Finally, we often experience the loss of our worldviews when we lose someone: the loss can affect our faith, sense of security, and trust in the world. Everything we thought was “true” about the world feels different now that someone so important to us has died. We wonder where our loved ones are now. We wonder why life has to hurt so much. We wonder if we will ever feel safe and “okay” again. When we grieve, we experience the loss of these beliefs, and we have to spend time putting them back together again. Our beliefs often look different as a result of losing our loved one, and it can take some time to rebuild them.

## Activity Suggestions

Write down everything that you have lost on a piece of paper: your routines, traditions, dreams, beliefs, memories, etc. It is helpful to be able to see all of the different components of your loss for a couple of reasons. First, it helps you realize *why* it can be so difficult to lose someone you love. Second, it helps you realize what areas you need to focus on as you rebuild your life and integrate the loss of your loved one.



## 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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