

Bereavement Services

Redefining Strength

“It amazes me what humans can do, even when streams are flowing down their faces and they stagger on, coughing and searching, and finding.”

– Markus Zusak, *The Book Thief*

I'm often surprised by the number of people who describe themselves as “not strong” when they are grieving. The underlying assumption with this statement is that feeling sad and crying are signs of weakness. My guess is that this description of “not strong” is actually most people's way of expressing their resentment that they have to feel their grief at all, as well as their frustration that this ongoing pain does not seem to end. They describe themselves as “not strong” because they do not know how to stop feeling their sadness.

However, people who experience loss actually exhibit an immense amount of strength. Losing someone we love is incredibly difficult; it changes nearly every single aspect of our lives. It takes strength to adapt to these changes. For example, perhaps you always went to your parents' house for the holidays, and now you have to find a new tradition because of your loss. Or maybe you have to learn how to do your household's taxes or cook for one person for the first time. It takes strength to learn how to make these adjustments: to change holiday traditions, take care of new responsibilities, and adapt to new routines.



Additionally, tears are actually a *symbol* of strength. When we cry in front of someone, we are allowing ourselves to be vulnerable. We are showing someone else the deepest, most intimate sides of ourselves. It takes strength to be comfortable with that level of vulnerability. It takes courage to trust the other person with our innermost thoughts and feelings. Crying in front of someone takes strength because of the level of trust and confidence it requires.

Instead of describing ourselves as not strong, perhaps we need to *expand* our understanding of strength. Strength can include all the ways you attempt to continue living your life while still remembering your loved one. Moreover, when you want to challenge yourself, instead of trying to

force yourself to get over your sadness, challenge yourself to grow in a different direction. Challenge yourself to try new activities, hobbies or social engagements. Many of these will help you feel proud of yourself and your growth, and they may also help you process your grief in a different way.

Activity Suggestions

- List the ways that you have demonstrated strength since your loved one's death. You may be surprised at how much you have actually grown and changed when you take time to reflect and be creative about your understanding of strength.
- Find an inspirational quote or poem that is unique to you. Place it somewhere that you will see every day (for example, tape it to your mirror or use it as a bookmark).
- Challenge yourself to try a new activity or hobby that you have not previously tried. It takes courage to try something new, and you will likely feel pride at your own growth.

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

The Value of Support Groups

“We bereaved are not alone. We belong to the largest company in all the world – the company of those who have known suffering.”

– Helen Keller

Many individuals tell me that it is intimidating to think about attending a support group. When we discuss it, there are a couple of common factors in their intimidation. Some people think they only need to attend a support group if they are “doing really bad,” so they are hesitant to join one. Other people find it overwhelming to come to a group when they know little about the group members and how the time is spent. It is these factors that often stop people from attempting a support group.

Support groups are meant for anyone who wants to connect with others who have similar experiences. It is very powerful to hear someone else’s thoughts and feelings and realize they resonate with our own. Many bereaved individuals describe it as “finding out they are normal.” This gives them permission to continue to think and feel the way they do without feeling guilt or shame about it.

Additionally, many people describe it as beneficial to simply know that there are other people in the world that are like them. When we lose someone we love, it is easy to look at other people in the world and think that there is no one else who has lost a parent, child, sibling or spouse. However, by attending a support group, you connect with others who have had a similar loss. This is a shared experience and support that you might not find even among your closest friends and family members; it is an experience that only someone else with a similar loss will understand.

Finally, support groups provide space to talk about your loved one and what it is like to live without him or her. We live in a fast-paced world in which it would be relatively easy to try and ignore the thoughts and feelings we have about losing our loved one. This issue with trying to ignore our grief, however, is that it will eventually catch up to us. Attending a support group is a way of ensuring that we are creating space to reflect on our grief and how it is influencing our lives.



Activity Suggestions

- Challenge yourself to try attending one group session. The only way to know whether a support group will be beneficial for you is to try attending a session.
- Contact your local bereavement coordinator and talk to him or her in person or on the phone about support groups. You might find it easier to attend if you talk beforehand because you will have some idea of what to expect.
- List the potential benefits that could happen from attending a support group. For example, you may find new friends and acquaintances and you will have the chance to remember your loved one.

Anne Alesch, Bereavement Coordinator

Phone: 515-557-3169

Email: anne.alesch@unitypoint.org

unitypointhospice.org

Heidi Larson, Bereavement Coordinator

Phone: 515-557-3204

Email: heidi.larson@unitypoint.org

unitypointhospice.org

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.



UnityPoint Hospice