

# Bereavement Services

## Spirituality and Grief

**“My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered from time to time.”**

**– C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed***

When we lose someone we love, it changes our entire world. We are forced to confront the reality that we are mortal and that our time on earth is limited. We are forced to confront the reality that we are separated from the people we love. We are forced to confront the reality that we can experience intense pain. Losing someone we love brings awareness to realities that we may not have previously acknowledged.



Confrontations with death often impact our faith and spirituality. Sometimes people worry that their spiritual beliefs change after their loved ones die. However, it is understandable that death changes our spirituality because it touches the deepest, most intimate parts of our selves. It inspires us to ask questions and feel emotions that we have not had before. Our spirituality changes because everything else in our world has changed, and our spirituality reflects the new experiences.

I have heard numerous ways that death impacts people's faith. Sometimes people's sense of faith increases; they feel the support of the divine on their difficult journey. Other people experience a strong sense of doubt and anger. It can be very difficult to reconcile the existence of a higher power with the feelings of loss and sadness that we have. Death almost inevitably impacts our spirituality in some manner.

Try to be aware that your spirituality will likely change after the loss of your loved one. You will feel some intense emotions and think of new questions and ideas. It will take some time for you to understand and incorporate everything into your sense of spirituality. Be patient with the process; it will take time for you to feel at peace with where you are in your spiritual journey.

## Activity Suggestions

- Write a letter to your higher power that describes your thoughts and feelings after your loved one's death.
- Talk to a pastor, spiritual director or pastoral counselor. They have specialized training to help you sort through the questions and ideas you have.
- Read *A Grief Observed* by C.S. Lewis.
- Work on connecting physically with your spirituality by practicing yoga or meditation. If you are struggling with some of the new ideas you have, these ideas can help ground you.

## 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.



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# The Value of Ritual

**“Any ritual is an opportunity for transformation. To do a ritual, you must be willing to be transformed in some way.”**

**– Miriam Simos, American writer & activist known as Starhawk**

Rituals are a valuable component of the grief journey. Rituals help us realize that a significant change has occurred and incorporate the effects of that change into our daily lives. For example, we are usually most familiar with funerals as rituals in our grief journey. This ritual takes place soon after our loved one's death, and it is a way to celebrate and sanctify the life of our loved one.

Funerals are valuable rituals, but they are only one of the types of rituals that can take place on the grief journey. For example, we have rituals that signify the continuity of our relationships with our loved ones. Even though our loved one is deceased, we continue to have a special bond with him or her. This bond can be symbolized, for example, by lighting a candle at a family gathering to represent his or her presence. Or perhaps you create a ritual of visiting your loved one's grave every week. Try to think of ways to honor your loved one's continued place in your life.

Another type of ritual is a transition ritual. These symbolize the changes that occur as a result of your loved one's death. For example, perhaps you decide you are ready to donate your loved one's clothes. Setting aside specific time to sort through the clothes and donate them is a ritual that represents you processing the changes that have occurred as a result of your loved one's death. Transition rituals indicate that there are parts of your life that are different now.

Finally, there are rituals of affirmation. These rituals validate the way our loved one has positively impacted our life, and how we continue to grow as a result of their love and support. For example, perhaps your loved one was responsible for the household budget. You feel grateful that your loved one did this, and you experience growth as you learn to do this task on your own. Writing a letter to your loved one is a ritual that affirms this gift of support from your loved one, and it also validates the change in growth you have experienced.



## 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.

### Activity Suggestions

- Write a list of rituals that you are already doing. This will help you realize that you are likely doing more to process your grief and loss than you even realize.
- Brainstorm rituals that you think would be helpful and try some of them! Many people report feeling sad when they actually do the ritual, but that they feel better overall when it is finished.
- Plan ahead for the holidays and your usual traditions. Decide which traditions you want to keep, and brainstorm new rituals that can include the presence of your loved one.
- Find a way to celebrate the ways you have grown. Share with others when you develop a new skill or learn something new.

**Anne Alesch, Bereavement Coordinator**

**Phone:** 515-557-3169

**Email:** [anne.alesch@unitypoint.org](mailto:anne.alesch@unitypoint.org)

[unitypointhospice.org](http://unitypointhospice.org)

**Heidi Larson, Bereavement Coordinator**

**Phone:** 515-557-3204

**Email:** [heidi.larson@unitypoint.org](mailto:heidi.larson@unitypoint.org)

[unitypointhospice.org](http://unitypointhospice.org)



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