

Bereavement Services

Maintaining a Relationship with Your Loved One

“Grief releases love and it also instills a profound sense of connection.”

– Jacqueline Novogratz

One of the hardest things about losing a loved one is the loss of their presence. I often hear people say that they keep expecting their loved one to walk through the door, or that they pick up the phone to call them, only to remember that they are gone. As our loved one was a fixture in our life, it is normal to sometimes forget their absence. Physical absence, however, does not mean they must be gone from us entirely.

Gone, but not forgotten.

Losing a loved one can be one of the most difficult struggles one can endure; the people we love contribute to who we are. This contribution connects us to them in indelible ways. Finding opportunities and ways to acknowledge that connection can be important in continuing those bonds.

We can remain connected to those we love in several ways, even though they are physically gone to us. This can be as simple as talking to them in moments of anxiety or grief. Another way to remain connected is by recognizing the impact they had on your life and who you are. For example, if your father was an avid fisherman and shared this with you, taking your children or grandchildren fishing can be a way of sharing his legacy and honoring your grief.



We can become stuck in our grief and mired down when we feel disconnected from those we love and from others. If you need time and space on your own and feel taxed by the presence of others, *give yourself permission to be away*. It is “okay” to have moments of solitude. However, try to continue to communicate with your friends and family within these moments so that you do not completely isolate yourself from others. Connection and relationships help us to grieve in purposeful and healthy ways.

Activity Suggestions

- Write a letter to your loved one or create a scrapbook of memories you had together. Allow yourself to laugh and cry as you need as you recall special memories.
- If you're angry at the person who died, allow yourself to be angry. Tell them why you're angry. Find a safe way to physically express that anger. Go for a walk or find some Play-Doh to squish as you think about your anger.
- Share memories of your loved one with others. Talk about the impact they had on your life and how you want to continue honoring them.
- If you are feeling alone in your grief, consider seeking out a support group or talking to a grief counselor to find an empathic ear and create new connections.

Tangible Memories: Attending to Possessions

“Grief is in two parts. The first is loss. The second is the remaking of life.”

– Anne Roiphe

Beneath my bed is a small metal tin covered in delicately painted orange blossoms. It has moved with me to college, to the first home I shared with my husband, and to every home since. It has no worth other than that it belonged to my grandmother. She gave it to me in the days before she died; it is one of the few things I have that was hers. Every now and again, I remove it from its hiding place and turn it over in my hands. While it has little purpose or monetary value and does not even have a dedicated space in my home, I cannot bear to part with it. It connects me to my grandmother with invisible strings.



When someone we love dies, their possessions stay with us and leave behind memories of that person. Our culture tells us that we are supposed to “move on” and let go of these things. In truth, there is no set timetable for what we should or shouldn’t do with the things our loved one left behind. Those possessions can help us recall what we loved about that person and how they made us who we are.

There are multiple ways we can remember and honor our loved ones. Holding on to something that reminds us of them is one way we can remember, celebrate, and share them with others. Someday, I will take my box out from its hiding place and show it to my son. I will tell him about his great-grandmother, whose spirit was as vibrant and beautiful as the blossoms on the tin. In that moment of sharing and remembering, she will spring to life again.

Activity Suggestions

- Display a few of your loved one’s small items in a shadow box or some other display area. This way, you can share a piece of their story with others.
- Use your *own* judgement regarding when it’s time to sort through your loved one’s belongings. Some people are ready to do this immediately. For some, they need months or even years. There will be a moment when you are ready. Ask a trusted friend or family member to help you with this process if you feel that you cannot do it alone. Use the time together to grieve with one another as you go through the belongings and reminisce.
- If you have a beloved piece of clothing that you want to use to help yourself remember your loved one, have it repurposed into a pillow cover or quilt blocks.
- While it is “okay” to hold on to these things, remember that they are still only things. If keeping them deprives you of your living space, places you in harm’s way or causes you to overextend yourself financially, consider talking to a friend or professional for additional support. This could be a sign of a larger, unaddressed grief issue.

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 supports 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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