

Grove Park Hospice NEWSLETTER

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Dealing with Grief & Loss During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Grieving is never easy. It can be long and difficult and raw. But when life was “normal” before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were many social supports in place to help that process.

Visits from friends. Hugs. Spending time with loved ones in the hospital or nursing homes for visits. Memorial services. Group and individual counseling sessions. Now, so much of that is not possible. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and stay-at-home orders where physically distancing each other is good for our physical health, the grieving process has become incredibly challenging.

“It’s a different type of grief. It’s a complicated grief,” said Bonita Stone, IU Health Hospice Bereavement Coordinator. Whether you or a loved one has lost someone during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are several steps you can take for yourself or to help someone in need.

How to Address Feelings of Guilt

Maybe you weren’t able to visit your loved one in the hospital or be there in the final moments before someone’s passing. Particularly for family members of those who have died from COVID-19, Stone said there may be more guilty feelings as people start asking the “what ifs”. (Cont. on Page 2)

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(Cont. from Page 1) What if I had not put my loved one in that long-term care facility? What if I infected my loved one with the COVID-19? Stone said you have to remember the situations you can – and can't -- control, whether that's a visitation policy or a decision you might have made years ago.

"There's nothing you did purposely," Stone said. "Feeling guilty about the nursing home, for example — you felt like you put them in a safe nursing home. Ask yourself what could you do differently about that?"

Finding Closure

For many, the comfort of a memorial service or funeral or ceremony after a loved one's passing can provide a sense of closure. But now, many of these events due to social distancing are either limited to a small service or have been postponed to an unknown later date.



Some funeral homes have come up with creative offerings, including drive-up viewing services. But none of those create what one envisions as normal. Stone said that closure may not happen, even in normal circumstances with a single event such as a funeral. She said people still will have to work through secondary losses, too, which are other losses associated to losing the loved one.

"Closure sometimes takes a while," Stone said. "In most cases closure doesn't happen overnight."

And while a missed funeral service/ceremony is certainly something to grieve – and to reschedule when possible – it's a good reminder now for someone who might see it as the only way to find closure. That's one reason why Stone said she makes a practice of calling people who have lost a loved one in the first two of weeks after the death and she will make a 3 months call, 6 months call, 9 months call and the one year call. The one year call sometimes surprises people, because she remembers the patient's date of death. The call is always welcome because most times they still need that support, she said.

Finding Connections & Self-Coping

Grief can be an isolating experience. While we may be isolated physically, there are still ways we can connect with others. Stone is meeting with people on the phone daily doing counseling sessions. She's checking in with others.

If you're going through the grieving process, Stone recommends several things you can do:

- Call and talk to people
- Talk to a counselor
- Read – find trusted online resources about the grieving process
- Take care of yourself (For taking care of yourself, it can be simple – rest, eat properly, do a little exercise, walk around the house, get some fresh air.)

What are warning signs?

If you are struggling to find those social connections or cope, there are some early warning signs you can watch out for. If you're not sleeping well (or not at all), not eating, not talking to anyone, not leaving the house, feeling that life is meaningless, or even simple actions like not opening curtains anymore, those are some isolating signs that Stone says can draw additional concern. In those instances, reach out for help. (Cont. on Page 3)

(Cont. from Page 2)

How to Help Someone Grieving

If you know someone who is grieving, the easiest thing to do is reach out as a friend:

- Listen – don't feel like you have to have all the answers
- Ask if there's something you can bring them and drop off on the front porch
- Be there for them 2-3 weeks later ... and 2-3 months later ... and a year later as well

"Those first few days, everyone's calling with condolences, bringing food, etc.," Stone said. "A week or two later they don't hear from anybody. They continue to need support."

Source: *Indiana University Health, Published May 12, 2020 (<https://iuhealth.org/thrive/dealing-with-grief-loss-during-covid-19-pandemic>)*

A Word From Our Chaplain/Bereavement Coordinator, Rev. Dr. Beth Yarborough

"The journey through grief is life-changing. When you leave the wilderness of your grief, you are simply not the same person as you were when you entered the wilderness. You have been through so much. How could you be the same?" (Understanding your Grief, by Alan Wolfelt)

When I think of a wilderness, I am reminded of the uninhabited expanses of rocky and dry terrain in the Middle East. A trip through one of these barren stretches seems to go on forever. There are no rest stops and certainly, no convenience stores. One day in the Judean wilderness my travelling companions and I encountered a blinding sandstorm. The dust was so thick it was impossible to see forcing our driver to stop and wait out the storm. These sandstorms are transformative rendering major changes in the landscape. Roads are unidentifiable under thick layers of sifted sand; sand dunes are rearranged. If it were not for the experienced bus driver's knowledge of the area, we most certainly would never have found our way.

Grief can feel very much like a wilderness and can seem to go on forever with little relief or rest from the sadness and despair. In the wilderness of grief it is easy to become disoriented and lose one's way. While grief is transformative in many ways, this period can also be isolating and lonely. There is little doubt you will emerge as a changed person. Perhaps in this transformation you will discover new insights and deeper compassion for yourself and for others.

Everyone experiences grief in their own personal and unique way. What works for one may not be helpful for another. If you find yourself lost in a sandstorm of deep grief, it can be helpful to work with an experienced grief counsellor to find your way. We are available to assist you in your journey. I will be in touch with you periodically through phone calls, letters and newsletters throughout the year following your loss. In the meantime, please feel free to call me at (803) 536-6644 if you have questions or need resources.

Rev. Dr. Beth Yarborough



We need Volunteers! Please call Christie at (803) 536-6644 for more information.



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The Grove Park Family remains faithfully dedicated to
RESTORING DIGNITY, OFFERING HOPE AND PROVIDING COMFORT

Additional Resources:

<http://www.aarp.org/family/lifeafterloss/>
<http://www.hospicenet.org/html/bereavement.html>
<http://www.hospicefoundation.org>
<http://www.griefnet.org>
<http://goodgrief.org/grief>
<http://www.hospicehelp.org/events.htm>
<http://www.griefrecoverymethod.com/about-us>
http://www.tributes.com/grief_recovery_center/index

