



# IN TOUCH

## *Bereavement Newsletter*

Bereavement Department (602) 530-6970 or [hov.org](http://hov.org)

MAY / JUNE 2021

## SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL REACTIONS TO LOSS

### **Social reactions**

There are times when you would give anything to be with your loved one again, if only long enough to be relieved of your loneliness and reassured that your loved one is still a part of your life. At other times, you may feel a need for solitude, to withdraw temporarily from others and the pressures and decisions of daily life. This need to turn inward, to reflect on your loss, to get in touch with your innermost feelings, can be a helpful time for you to find your tears and figure out where you are going from here.

As a child, you may have learned that feelings should be buried and mourning should be done alone. Perhaps you never learned to accept or ask for help. As an adult, you may be too embarrassed or ashamed to let your emotions show in front of others, equating grief with self-indulgence or self-pity. You may feel isolated, different and apart from everyone else, convinced that no one understands. You may feel stunned at the normalcy of life around you as people go about their business, totally unaware that your world has stopped and your entire life has been turned upside down.

Some people you know may be done with your grieving long before you are, expecting you to be “over it by now” or worrying that you’re somehow “hanging on” to your grief. Uncomfortable with your strong feelings, they may change the subject or avoid any mention of your loved one’s name.

### *Suggestions for coping with loneliness and isolation*

- Think about who is supportive to you and the most accepting and caring with your grief. Look for those who will listen without judging you, or for those who have suffered a similar loss.
- Find time with others to talk, to touch, to receive support. Be honest about what you’re feeling. Allow yourself to express your sadness.
- Don’t expect others to guess what you need. When you want to be touched, held, hugged, listened to or pampered, say so.
- If all you want from others is help with simple errands, tasks and repairs, say so.
- Let others (especially children) know if and when you need to be alone, so they won’t feel rejected.
- Go somewhere and have a good, long cry—and do it as often as you wish. You have every right to miss the person who has died. Accept your feelings as normal.
- Identify your loneliest times, and think of ways to alter your routines and environment (for example, rearrange the furniture in a room; plan your weekends ahead of time; use your microwave for quick, easy meals).
- Realize that no one can totally understand the relationship you had with your loved one. Though well-intentioned, things said to you may hurt.
- Ask people to remember, talk about and share stories about your loved one with you.

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## SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL REACTIONS TO LOSS *(continued)*

### Spiritual reactions

Regardless of one's identification or affiliation with an organized religion, spiritual doubts and questions may arise when a loved one dies. Suffering a major loss often leads us to confront and re-think our basic beliefs about God, religion, death and the afterlife. Some may turn to God as a source of strength and consolation at the time of a loved one's death and find their faith has deepened. Others may question the religious teachings they've practiced all their lives and find the very foundations of their beliefs shaken to the core. Even those who had no religious upbringing at all may feel abandoned by God or angry with God for "letting their loved one get sick and die." Not all people respond to loss in the same way, and not everyone shares the same cultural, religious or spiritual beliefs about death and the afterlife.

Death forces us to confront the spiritual questions we may have been avoiding or haven't taken time to address, the questions that get at the very heart and meaning of life: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?

Whether a strong religious faith will be a help or a hindrance in your recovery from grief depends on what you believe and how your beliefs are practiced. Like any other tool, religion can be used in healthy, appropriate ways, or it can be abused in unhealthy, inappropriate ways.

Religion can be a great antidote for the loneliness that accompanies every major loss, and it can be a source of strength and group support. What it cannot do is give us immunity from loss or give us back our lost loved ones—nor can it provide us with a shortcut through grief.



This is an excerpt from the book, *Finding Your Way through Grief: A Guide for the First Year*, Second Edition, by Marty Tousley, CNSBC, FT, DCC.

If you would like to purchase a copy of this book (\$12), visit <https://hov.org/news/> and click on the "Online Store" link at the bottom of the page.



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It will never be the same.  
I will never be the same.  
You came. We loved. You left.  
I will survive until I survive.  
And one day I will find myself alive again.  
—From "How to Survive the Loss of Love"  
Colgrove, Bloomfield, McWilliams

## ADULT GRIEF SUPPORT GROUPS

**At the time of printing, in-person groups** are offered virtually and telephonic grief counseling is also available. For bereavement support, call (602) 530-6970.

If you are in need of crisis support, please call the **Maricopa County Crisis Response Network:** (602) 222-9444 or **Non-Crisis Warm Line:** (602) 347-1100.

## FINDING COMFORT IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

People who are grieving can be especially vulnerable to outside stressors such as uncertainty caused by COVID-19. Here are some ideas to successfully move through these changing times:

- **Stay calm.** Focus on the positive. Remind yourself this is a temporary situation and do what you can to assist others in a safe way.
- **Have a daily plan.** Whether you are working from home or not working during this outbreak, organize your time and keep your schedules as normal as possible, so life can still feel manageable.
- **Maintain your environment.** Keeping things orderly in your personal world counters feeling of helplessness. Do things that give you a sense of control. Clean a cupboard. Make your lunch and eat it on schedule.
- **Manage anxiety as it occurs.** Thought stopping can be an effective technique to prevent our imaginations from spiraling out of control.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** This is very important. Empty calories do not give you the healthy fuel you need to feel good. They can bog down your system and weaken your emotional immunity. Be aware that alcohol significantly lowers physical immunity. Find alternative ways of relaxing.
- **Breathe.** To stay calm and centered, breathe in short bursts through your nose for a count of 4, hold your breath for a count of 6, and slowly release for a count of 8. Do this hourly for a few minutes or whenever you're anxious.
- **Exercise.** Exercise is a must to help manage stress, depression or anxiety. Your body's natural serotonin is one of nature's most important mood stabilizers. Research shows even a short brisk walk can effectively manage depression.
- **Listen to uplifting music.** Whatever genre you enjoy, play music, sing along and dance a little. It's a great way to fit in a little exercise and lift your spirits.
- **Find your positive voice.** Watch your narrative. Our thoughts tend to be more negative when we are hurt and grieving. Connect with positive people. Read, watch programs and find uplifting stories to engage your mind.
- **Don't isolate.** Isolation is a huge trigger when grieving. Call, text or email at least two people daily to avoid negativity and maintain social connections. Everyone benefits.
- **Embrace the extra time you gain through social distancing.** Choose to be creative. Enjoy your current hobby or create a new one. Take advantage of YouTube or other social media to learn something new. Spend time with pets and pamper yourself.
- **Limit how much you talk about the virus.** Set limits on news watching. Stay informed but do normal activities.
- **Don't collapse.** To center yourself, create a schedule, put things on paper, engage in a project, organize a meal or a family activity.
- **Do a spiritual reset.** Instead of getting lost in uncertainty, realize that all we really know about is today. Challenge yourself to appreciate "living in the moment." Practice mindfulness or short meditations to help you focus on the present. [hov.org/our-care/mindfulness](http://hov.org/our-care/mindfulness)



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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Bereavement services

Hospice of the Valley provides bereavement support for up to 13 months following the death of your loved one. Virtual support groups and telephonic or virtual grief counseling support are available. Information can be found at [hov.org/grief-support-groups](http://hov.org/grief-support-groups), or by calling (602) 530-6970.

### **“Gone from our Sight, Never from Our Hearts”**

If you have recently suffered the death of a loved one and would benefit from sharing with other adults who are also newly bereaved (3–6 months), this might be the right group for you.

This group is 80% psychosocial education with the goal of providing greater understanding of the grief journey; the tasks of mourning; and how to grow forward to a meaningful life without the physical presence of our loved one.

For more information or to pre-register for this virtual group, call (602) 636-5390.

Additional resources are available at <https://hov.org/our-care/grief-support/>.

### New Song Center for Grieving Children

New Song Center for Grieving Children, a program of Hospice of the Valley, provides grief support groups for children, youth, young adults and adults. Support groups are currently being offered for all age groups virtually, at no cost to participants. We will update you as soon as we can safely return to in-person groups.

**“Enduring Ties”** is an evening support group for families that have experienced the death of a minor child. There is also a support group for grandparents grieving the death of a grandchild.

**“Luz del Corazón”** is a support group program for families whose first language is Spanish and who have experienced any type of loss through death.

For more information, call (480) 951-8985 or view [newsongcenter.org](http://newsongcenter.org).