

"There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are messengers of overwhelming grief . . . and unspeakable love."

-Washington Irving

Quick Links

Hollandhospice.org

YoungWidow.org
book lists, online resources
and support

GriefNet.org
online support groups

GROWW.org
online bereaved community

wpsgr.org
Grand Rapids Widowed persons
service: local groups and support

Doug.org
website for children, teens and
parents following a loss

WebHealing.com
grief resources

Centering.org
grief resources and books

Griefshare.org
nationwide grief support
program; find one nearby

Griefwatch.com
resource for more websites

Griefwords.com

bereaveddadsnetwork.com

whatsyourgrief.com

The Journey of Grief

You are on the journey of grief. This journey is not one you chose and is not one you can choose to avoid. Much like the continued turning of the calendar and changing of the seasons, grief sweeps you up and in without permission. Because you are an individual with your own personality and distinct relationship with your person, your journey of grief is unique to you; remember, though, that you do not walk the path alone. The Hospice of Holland Bereavement Team is here to assist you. We hope you receive this newsletter as a reminder you are not alone and find in it helpful articles and resources, as well as reminders of upcoming events.

Grief & COVID-19

In addition to all the usual patterns of grief as discussed, it is important to know that our current reality is likely heightening your grief responses. As a result of COVID-19, there is increased isolation and a need to maintain physical distancing from those who might be most helpful to you in your grief. You may not be able to give or receive hugs, sit nearby, or even have a face-to-face conversation without a mask covering half of your face. It is important to find ways to feel connected with others, even for minimal amounts of time, to assist you in moving forward in grief. If you're surprised by the intensity of your grief right now, know it is likely due to the world around you. You haven't done anything wrong and there is nothing abnormal about your grief. If you have any concerns about how your grief is manifesting, please contact a bereavement counselor. Being heard and validated can go a long way in alleviating the additional burden you might be carrying in this season.

Seasons of Grief and Healing

The winter season gets mixed reviews. For some, it is a season that is anticipated because of winter sports and snow days; for others, it is dreaded because of travel interruptions due to snow and the inability to remain warm. Likewise, grievers face winter differently depending on the length of the grief.

If you are early in your grief, the shorter, darker days of winter will either be welcomed or feared. If grieving alone is the preference, the tendency to stay home on long winter nights is a welcome excuse not to connect, but if your grief benefits from interaction with others, the typical increase in isolation can feel scary. The goal in early grief is to strike a balance of time with others and time alone to process your grief. Look for the fine line between cozying up under blanket for self-care and isolating.

If it has been several months since the loss of your person, you may experience winter a bit differently. When a friend asks to go snowshoeing, you are surprised to find yourself ready to try something new. You enjoy the quietness of home, but recognize you no longer need it to cope with grief. Instead, those

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Seasons of Grief and Healing *Continued*

quiet times are now times of reflection on what is next for you. Remember, though, just as a forecasted light dusting of snow can without warning turn into a winter storm, so grief waves can continue to crash without any warning. Because of your experience with them, though, such waves are no longer feared. You face them, experience them, and watch them wash away.

Maybe you are someone who has lived nearly a year since your person died. You might get together with friends or family, play in the snow, and experience hope as you reengage in your life. Yet all the while, a quiet presence of grief is with you. It doesn't interfere like it used to, but it is there as a reminder of your person and of your shared love. You are able to appreciate the stretches of bleary days as much as the days of blissful sun, taking from each what you can as you continue forward.

No matter where in grief you find yourself this winter, remember you do not need to force yourself to feel anything but what you feel. Release yourself from any "shoulds", and extend yourself grace. Let each day be what you need it to be. Just as we can count on one season to change to the next, so you can be assured your grief will continue to change, the edges will dull, and you will regain a desire and ability to participate more fully in life. Read on for a few tips to help you cope with this latest change in season.

Self-Care Suggestions

- Go at your own pace. Remember this is your journey and you set the expectation for each day's tasks. When considering an activity or a project, ask yourself if it is life-giving or draining. If it is draining, consider putting it off to another time.
- Tackle the Project. Winter is the ideal time to begin tackling the at-home projects you have been putting off. Whether reorganizing or dealing with clutter, remember to break the project down into manageable pieces. You do not need to hold yourself to any kind of timetable. Do what you can in a given day and then do something enjoyable.
- Experience. Grief's greatest lie is that there is no remaining desire to participate in life. To counteract this, intentionally experience things both new and familiar. Be present in conversations. Let yourself laugh at a funny movie. Take a walk in freshly fallen snow and challenge yourself to notice 5 beautiful things.
- Get Creative. With all the extra time indoors, winter is also the ideal season to rediscover, or learn, a creative hobby. Painting, cross stitch, knitting, quilting, puzzles, story writing, drawing, dance, writing music, etc. Find something to engage the creative part of your brain.
- Journal. Winter is also a season ideal to begin or resume journal writing. It is a season of reflection, and a journal is a great way to do so. See below for information on a Journaling Your Grief workshop.
- Speak your person's name and story.
- Reach out to your support system or ask them to reach out to you if you're not ready to do the contacting. Grief is unique and individual, but we aren't meant to do it alone.

Upcoming Events/Support Groups

Going Solo (Virtual) – A spousal loss support group for those in the first year of grief. This will take place virtually (internet connection with video and audio capabilities required). Sessions will be held the 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month from 10a – 11:30a. Please call 616-355-5544 to learn more and register.

Journaling Your Grief – This virtual workshop teaches four different journaling techniques that can be used to creatively process and express your grief. The complete video instruction and accompanying handouts are available on a USB; USB port and video player are required for use. To have a copy of the workshop mailed to you, please contact 616-355-5594.

Understanding Grief – This hour-long workshop and handouts are available via USB. Learn about grief from the comfort of your own home, at your convenience. A computer with a USB port is required to play. Request yours by calling 616.355.5594.

"Only people who are capable of loving strongly can also suffer great sorrow, but this same necessity of loving services to counteract their grief and heals them"

-Leo Tolstoy



Please remember that Hospice of Holland bereavement counselors are available to speak with you one-on-one to help you in your grieving process. Contact our office at 616-355-5594 for more information.