



# IN TOUCH

## Bereavement Newsletter

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

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2021

## GETTING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

When your loved one dies, you grieve not only for the person, but also for the life you used to have, the love the person gave you and all the special times you spent together. Perhaps there is no time of the year when you're more aware of the empty space your dear one has left behind than during the holiday season.

Holidays can create feelings of dread and anxiety in those who are bereaved. The clichéd images of family togetherness and the often unrealistic expectations of a season filled with picture-perfect, joyful gatherings can cause tremendous stress for those who are not grieving, let alone for those in the midst of the painful, isolating experience of loss. Holidays by nature are filled with nostalgia and tradition, but in grief, even the happiest memories can hurt. When you're in the midst of pain, and the rest of the world wants to give thanks and celebrate, you need to find ways to manage your pain and get through the season with a minimum amount of stress.

### Suggestions for coping with the holidays

**Have a family meeting.** List all the things you ordinarily do for the holidays (sending greeting cards, decorating the house, stringing outdoor lights, putting up a tree, holiday baking, entertaining business associates, buying something special to wear, going to parties, visiting friends, exchanging gifts, preparing a big meal, etc.) Decide together what's important to each of you, what you want to do this year, what you can let go of, and what you can do differently. For each task on the list, ask yourself these questions: Would the holidays be the holidays without doing this? Is this something I really want to do? Do I do it freely, or out of habit or tradition? Is it a one-person job, or can it be a group effort? Who is responsible for getting it done? Do I really like doing it?

**Do some things differently this year.** Trying to recreate the past may remind you all the more that your loved one is missing. This year, try celebrating the holidays in a totally different way. Nothing is the same as it used to be anyway. Go to a restaurant. Visit relatives or

friends. Travel somewhere you've never gone before. If you decide to put up a tree, put it in a different location and make or buy different decorations for it. Hang a stocking in your loved one's memory, and ask each family member to express their thoughts and feelings by writing a note to, from or about your loved one, and place the notes in that special stocking for everyone to read. Buy a poinsettia for your home as a living memorial to your loved one for the holiday season.

**Do other things more simply.** You don't have to discard all your old traditions forevermore, but you can choose to observe the holidays on a smaller scale this year.

**Take good care of yourself.** Build time in your day to relax, even if you're having trouble sleeping. Eat nourishing, healthy meals, and if you've lost your appetite, eat smaller portions more frequently throughout the day. (Sweet, sugary foods are everywhere, from Halloween until Easter, but too much sugar will deplete what little energy you have.) Get some daily exercise, even if it's just a walk around

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## GETTING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS *(continued)*

the block. Avoid drinking alcohol, which intensifies depression and disrupts normal sleep.

**Just do it.** We all know that we ought to think positively, eat right, exercise more and get enough rest—but grief by its very nature robs us of the energy we need to do all those good and healthy things. Accept that in spite of what we know, it's often very hard to do what's good for us—then do it anyway. Don't wait until you feel like doing it.

**Pay attention to yourself.** Notice what you're feeling and what it is you need. Feelings demand expression, and when we acknowledge them and let them out, they go away. Feelings that are “stuffed” don't go anywhere; they just fester and get worse. If you need help from others, don't expect them to read your mind. It's okay to ask for what you need. Besides, doing a favor for you during the holidays may make them feel better, too. Be patient and gentle with yourself, and with others, as well.

**Expect to feel some pain.** Plan on feeling sad at certain moments throughout the season, and let the feelings come. Experience the pain and tears, deal with them, then let them go. Have faith that you'll get through this and that you will survive.

**Seek support from others.** Grieving is hard work, and it shouldn't be done alone. You need to share your experience with someone who understands the pain of your loss. If your spouse, relative or friend cannot be the source of that support, you can find it elsewhere. See page 3 for a list of support groups sponsored by Hospice of the Valley.

**Give something of yourself to others.** As alone as you may feel in your grief, one of the most healing things you can do for yourself is to be with other people, especially during the holidays. Caring for and giving to others will nourish and sustain you, and help you to feel better about yourself. If you can bring yourself to do so, visit someone in a nursing home, or volunteer your time at your church or synagogue. Do whatever you can, and let it be enough.



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.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Bereavement services

Hospice of the Valley provides bereavement support for up to 13 months following the death of your loved one. Support groups offered virtually and telephonic grief counseling are available. Information can be obtained by calling (602) 530-6970.

### 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 and in-person in Gilbert, Scottsdale and North Phoenix, at no cost to participants.

**“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 (602) 776-6789 (Spanish), email [info@newsongcenter.org](mailto:info@newsongcenter.org) or view [newsongcenter.org](http://newsongcenter.org).

## ADULT GRIEF SUPPORT GROUPS

*At the time of printing*, we are making plans to reopen some of our groups for in-person participation. Please watch for updates at [hov.org](http://hov.org) or call our Bereavement Dept.: (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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This annual remembrance event honors departed loved ones through a photo montage set to music. Join us for a virtual night of remembering loved ones who are no longer with us. Tune in to AZTV-Channel 7 on Sunday, Nov. 21, 2021, from 6–7 p.m.

The highlight of **Light Up a Life** is a photographic tribute to loved ones who have died. Everyone is welcome to submit a photo for the tribute, regardless of whether that person received Hospice of the Valley services. Please submit photos as soon as possible. **Final deadline is 5 p.m., Nov. 1, 2021.**

- Please submit only **one photo** per person (do not send multiple photos of the same person or collages)
- **No writing or graphics** on photos
- Digital photos **should be high-resolution** (at least 300 dpi); high-quality smart phone photos are okay
- Minimum size is 4" x 3"
- **Photo-lab** printed photos only, please. No photocopies, newspaper prints or prints made from desktop printers.

### Upload your photo

Submit your high-resolution photo electronically through our website: [hov.org/LUAL](http://hov.org/LUAL).

### Use your previously submitted photos

Please call (602) 530-6992, or email [LUAL@hov.org](mailto:LUAL@hov.org) to request a previously submitted photo be included in this year's tribute.

### Mail your photo

Mail your photo to Hospice of the Valley, Light Up a Life, 1510 E. Flower St., Phoenix, AZ 85014. Include this completed form and a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you would like the photo returned.

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### Please Join Us for a Child and Family-Focused Time of Remembrance

New Song Center, Ryan House and Phoenix Children's Hospital invite your children and family to participate in an in-person gathering to remember and honor your special loved one who died. Enjoy special arts and crafts, beautiful music and a meaningful remembrance ceremony.

**Sunday, Nov. 21, 2021** 4:30–5:30 p.m. | **Steele Indian School Park Ramadas** 300 E. Indian School Rd | **RSVP** (602) 776-6785