

# PATHWAYS TO HEALING

A NEWSLETTER TO AID IN BEREAVEMENT



Fall & Winter 2024

## Befriending Ourselves

By Judy Tatelbaum

**Facing the loss of a loved one is one of the most challenging experiences we ever have to confront.** Facing loss alone can feel unbearable and impossible. We often count on friends and family to help us come to grips with our loss. But even when we have supportive people around us, we still may be consumed with sorrow and overwhelmed at facing the *unknown road ahead*.

Support from friends, family or helping professionals may or may not be forthcoming. Regardless, we are the one person we actually need to be able to count on 24 hours a day. We can be our most valuable companion, support person, caregiver, and friend. Though we may not recognize this, we are the friend we need to cherish most as we move through and beyond our grief.

I learned this in the months following my husband's death a few years ago. *I found I had to be the one to pull me through my grief.* I had to help myself move forward. Nobody else could do that for me. I alone had to take good care of myself. Being our own best friend begins with paying attention to being understanding and supportive. That means we have to allow ourselves to cry when we need to cry or rage when we feel angry. Equally important is to be able to distract ourselves from our discomfort sometimes too. **Accepting rather than judging ourselves for our feelings or behaviors is another way we support and befriend ourselves.**

**Befriending ourselves** is a powerful gift when we face life's trials. Befriending means honoring our needs, listening to our thoughts and feelings, and asking questions like "How am I doing?" "How do I feel?" "What do I need right now?" Then allowing and accepting whatever we find out. This is like holding our own hand as we face all the uncomfortable feelings brought on by our loss. Anyone who has accomplished anything important in life has had to overcome self-doubt and self-criticism and may have had to fight against inner negativity.

As we grieve, we are learning to be our own support team. **Believing in ourselves**, accepting who we are, and honoring our needs is some of what it takes to be our own friend in the process of facing our loss. Speaking well of ourselves and offering positive words of encouragement instead of blaming or doubting or criticizing ourselves will uplift us on our journey toward healing. We need to trust that eventually we will be able to remember our lost loved one with appreciation and without pain.

**Judy Tatelbaum, MSW, LCSW, is a psychotherapist, public speaker, and author.  
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# Holiday Grief

**By Michelle Gladu, Social Worker  
Hospice of Central New York and of the Finger Lakes**

The holidays that fall and winter bring can be an especially difficult time for those grieving the death of a loved one. In ways large and small we are reminded of what we've lost and what will never be the same. Ignoring the holidays and hanging on until January may be the only thing we feel we can do – especially when experiencing the first holiday season without a loved one. However, these special days can be an opportunity to re-evaluate priorities and focus on what is most important. Some traditions may be very meaningful, while others can feel more like chores we do every year just because that's what we've always done. Keeping our hearts and minds open can help us do more than just survive the holidays.

## **Some things to consider:**

Creating some new rituals and traditions, such as lighting a special candle or including a new ornament to commemorate your loved one, can help. Consider having guests bring a dish to pass of a favorite food of your family member. Giving a toast, saying a prayer, sharing a funny story are all ways to include the memory of your loved one in the holidays.

Spending time with children in your life can bring a renewed sense of joy. Consider their wishes and needs in your holiday planning. Children may benefit from the continuity that traditions provide.

Helping others in the community can make the holidays feel more meaningful – especially if the death of your loved one means you will not have someone to celebrate with this year, or family relationships are complicated.

Doing something completely different this year – going out of town or celebrating with friends, for example – can help give the holidays a different feel if our memories of holidays past are difficult. Keeping in mind that others may grieve differently than you, and may have different needs when it comes to the holidays, can help prevent misunderstandings and hurt feelings when expectations clash. Communication and compromise are important.

Recognizing our limits is important, too. Grief is hard work, and you will likely not have the energy to do everything you might have done in the past. Saying “no” may be hard for others to accept, but necessary to maintain balance.

Finally, if you find yourself feeling joy this holiday season, remember that being happy isn't a betrayal of your loved one. Bittersweet though they may be, the holidays can be a time to honor and remember our loved ones and carry on their legacy.



# The Fear We Need To Embrace

**By Matthew P. Binkewicz, MA, FT, Chaplain**  
**Hospice of Central New York and of the Finger Lakes**

We may fear working through the grief and loss we experience after the death of a loved one. Often, we believe that the grief will be too much to bear. Some people think if they allow themselves to start crying, they may never be able to stop. And so, out of self-preservation, they may refuse themselves the opportunity to grieve appropriately.

They lock up all those feelings and emotions and avoid conversations pertaining to the death of their loved one. (Although they may feel they are protecting themselves, they can actually be only injuring themselves further.) *When we do not grieve*, the feelings do not simply go away. Instead, they simmer and boil beneath the surface until they can no longer be contained. When we avoid the grief in our life, it is like an untreated wound. Eventually, an unexpected infection or virus can take hold and cause a larger infection, leading to more complications that affect the entire body.

The repercussions of grief-avoidance are limitless. Not only can it impact our life, it can also impact family and friends. Substance abuse, broken relationships, isolation, and suicide are just a few of the common consequences of unresolved grief.

The reality of working through grief: It is painful and exhausting. It is called "*grief work*" because it is just that: **work**. So why do it? We must work through the grief because when we do, we can find healing. When we allow ourselves the opportunity to fully feel the pain, trauma, sadness, anger, betrayal and abandonment without self-imposed barriers, we can then also fully experience healing. Healing brings peace, comfort, joy, and the ability to continue living a meaningful life. Grief work is painful, but it is also temporary. When we are courageous enough to do grief work, I believe we fully acknowledge our own worth and the value of our loved one. With this work, we keep the memory of our departed loved ones.



## **Hospice Grief Support**

Hospice of Central New York and of the Finger Lakes provides in-person grief support groups for our hospice families and the community. Our groups meet once per week for 6 weeks and are held at our office at 990 Seventh North St. in Liverpool. Please check our website at [hospicecny.org](http://hospicecny.org) for upcoming sessions after the new year.

Hospice also offers individual and family grief support for the families and other caregivers of our hospice patients for 13 months after the death.

Finally, our Fall Service of Remembrance will be posted on our website later this fall. These services are offered in spring and fall, and families are invited in a separate mailing to contribute a photo of their loved one to be included in the service.

**Please contact us at (315) 634-1100 for more information.**



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Please check the Hospice website for information on upcoming support groups and the Fall Service of Remembrance

[www.hospicecny.org](http://www.hospicecny.org)

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