

Making Room for Grief



Dear Grieving Heart,

In these tender moments of loss, please know that the entire Spiritual Care Department at Erlanger extends its deepest condolences and heartfelt compassion to you and your loved ones. We understand that grief is not only an emotional journey but often a profound spiritual one, stirring questions and feelings that touch the very core of your being.

As you navigate this difficult time, we want to assure you that you are not alone. Our dedicated chaplains are here to offer a comforting presence, a listening ear, and spiritual support regardless of your faith tradition or spiritual path. Whether you seek quiet reflection, a moment of prayer, assistance with a sacred ritual, or simply someone to sit with you in silence, we are here to walk alongside you. May you find moments of peace and strength, and may your heart be gently held as you mourn.

With thoughts of peace and healing,

Spiritual Care and Chaplain Services at Erlanger
(423)778-7177

What is Grief?

Grief is a natural response to an important loss, and it can be very challenging. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Each of us grieves in our own way and at our own pace. Many things affect how we grieve and for how long. Grief may sometimes feel overwhelming.

As you begin your grieving process, knowing what to expect can help you cope with the pain and loneliness. It may help knowing your feelings are common.

The grieving process may be long, slow, and painful. Our emotional suffering may be expressed in anger, sadness, denial, and other emotions. Even though our reactions vary widely, there are common phases in the grief process. Each one is part of the overall process. Moving through these phases helps you adjust to and accept your loss over time. You may not go through the phases in order, or you might experience the same phase several times. Letting yourself feel these strong feelings will allow them to lessen over time.

— Grief Can Be a Series of Stages —

Denial

Trying to avoid the inevitable.
"This cannot be happening to me."

Anger

Frustrated outpouring of bottled up emotion.
"Why is this happening? Who is to blame?"

Bargaining

Seeking in vain for a way out.
"Make this not happen, and in return, I will _____."

Depression

Final realization of the inevitable.
"I'm too sad to do anything."

Acceptance

Finally finding a way forward.
"I am at peace with what happened."

— Grief Can Be a Roller Coaster —

Instead of a series of stages, we might also think of the grieving process as a roller coaster, full of ups and downs, highs and lows.

Like many roller coasters, the ride tends to be rougher in the beginning, the lows may be deeper and longer. The difficult periods should become less intense and shorter as time goes by, but it takes time to work through a loss. Even years after a loss, especially at special events such as a family wedding or the birth of a child, we may still experience a strong sense of grief.

Common Responses to Grief

You might experience physical, emotional, or behavioral symptoms as you cope with a loss. Here are some symptoms to look out for.

— Symptoms of Grief —

Physical Symptoms

- Sleep disturbances
- Shortness of breath
- Tightness in throat
- Physical distress
- Weight change

Emotional Symptoms

- Sadness
- Anger
- Guilt
- Anxiety
- Loneliness

Behavioral Symptoms

- Forgetfulness
- Worrying more about others
- Prolonged withdrawal from normal activity

The Four Tasks of Grief

Human beings tend to create strong emotional bonds with others. Grief is the strong emotional reaction that occurs when those bonds are threatened or broken. The work of grief cannot be hurried, and it takes a great deal of time. The death of a loved one can be considered the most stressful of all life situations.

Grief creates tasks that need to be accomplished. These tasks may seem overwhelming but can offer hope that something can be done and there is a way through the pain. The following are tasks that can be experienced as you grieve. For more information about the tasks, see J. William Worden's book on grief.

After allowing yourself to grieve, you will come to a turning point. You will have more energy, more interest in activities and people around you. You may find yourself focusing on good memories and a sense of gratitude for having had the person in your life. The memories are still there, and the wounds will begin to heal. By experiencing deep emotion and accepting it, you will grow in warmth, depth, understanding, and wisdom. Tasks can be revisited and reworked over time. Various tasks can be worked on at the same time. Remember, grieving is a fluid process.

— The Four Tasks of Grief —

1. *To accept the reality of the loss*
2. *To experience the pain of grief*
3. *To adjust to life after the loss*
4. *To maintain a connection while embracing the new normal*

Take Care of Yourself

- **Community and Fellowship:** While grief often feels like a profoundly solitary journey, finding connection and support within a caring community can be a source of immense spiritual comfort and healing. You are not alone in your sorrow, and sharing your experience with others who understand can lighten your burden. Allowing yourself to be held and supported by a compassionate community can strengthen your spirit, remind you of enduring love, and gently guide you forward on your path of healing.
- **Connecting with Nature:** In the midst of grief, the natural world can offer profound solace and a gentle sense of renewal. Connecting with nature is a powerful form of self-care that can calm your spirit and ground you during a time of immense change. Allow yourself to: Notice the small wonders around you, breathe deeply, and reflect and remember.
- **Forgiveness:** Grief can stir a complex array of emotions, and sometimes, forgiveness emerges as a quiet, yet powerful, part of the healing process. This isn't always about forgiving another person; it can also involve forgiving yourself, forgiving circumstances, or even wrestling with feelings towards a higher power. Understand that forgiveness is a personal journey, not a demand. It's about releasing the heavy burden of resentment, guilt, or anger that can hinder your peace. It is not about condoning what happened, but about choosing to free your own heart.
- **Gentle Movement:** Engage in light physical activities like walking, yoga, or stretching to release tension and improve your overall well-being.
- **Journaling:** Reflect on your feelings, memories, and hopes by writing in a journal. This process can help you process grief and find clarity.
- **Listening to Music:** Play calming or uplifting music to soothe your emotions and find moments of peace.
- **Mindful Breathing:** Take a few moments each day to focus on your breath. Inhale deeply for four counts, hold for four counts, and exhale for four counts. Repeat this process to calm your mind and body.
- **Nourishment:** Eat well-balanced meals and stay hydrated. Proper nutrition can help stabilize your energy and mood.
- **Prayer or Meditation:** Allow yourself quiet moments to connect with your spirituality or seek comfort in prayer.
- **Rest:** Make sure to allow yourself adequate time for sleep and relaxation. Grief is exhausting, and your body needs time to recover.
- **Ritual and Remembrance:** In the tender journey of grief, creating and engaging in rituals of remembrance can be a profound source of solace and connection. These acts, whether simple or elaborate, provide a tangible way to honor your loved one, express your feelings, and acknowledge their enduring presence in your heart and spirit. (e.g., lighting a candle, creating a memory altar, planting a tree, engaging in acts of service).
- **Scripture/Sacred Texts:** During times of profound loss, many find immense comfort, guidance, and peace by turning to sacred texts. Reading what resonates with your heart and faith can offer a unique form of self-care. Consider setting aside quiet moments each day to read passages that speak of hope, comfort, divine love, or eternal promise. These sacred verses can be a source of strength when you feel weak, a beacon of light when darkness seems overwhelming, and a reminder of spiritual truths that transcend earthly pain.
- **Set Realistic Expectations on Your Grief:** Just like a mosaic, no two experiences of grief are the same. Your grief is particular to all the unique aspects of your life. Grief is a deeply personal journey, and there's no "right" way to experience it. It's important to set realistic expectations for yourself during this challenging time. Allow yourself to feel what you feel without judgment and understand that healing takes time. It's okay to seek support, and it's okay to not be okay.

Spiritual Support Resources

Hospital Spiritual Care Services:

- **Direct Chaplaincy Support:** Chaplains are available for visits, prayer, spiritual support, grief support, and crisis spiritual support.
- **Sacraments/Rituals:** Chaplains can assist with requests for specific religious rites, sacraments (e.g., anointing of the sick, blessings, baptism in crisis) or spiritual rituals.
- **Quiet Reflection Spaces:** The hospital chapel or meditation room is a quiet space for spiritual reflection and prayer.
- **Contact Erlanger's House Supervisors** at 423-778-6168 for questions relating to funeral home arrangements after you have left the hospital.

Community Faith-Based Grief Support:

- **Local Church/Synagogue/Mosque/Temple Contacts:** Chaplains are available to contact your own faith leader or a local spiritual community.

Comforting Messages

During times of grief, words can offer solace. Below are some comforting messages to remind you that you are not alone:

- *"Grief is the price we pay for love, but in that love, we find strength to carry on."*
- *"Your pain is valid, your tears are sacred, and your journey is unique. Take it one step at a time."*
- *"Although the path of sorrow is dark, know that you are surrounded by light—love of family, friends, and the caring arms of your community."*
- *"Healing doesn't mean forgetting; it means finding peace and carrying cherished memories forward."*
- *"You are loved, supported, and held in the hearts of those who care for you during this time."*

Navigating Loss: Practical Resources

Resources for Counseling

There are many sources of support and information in most communities. Some of these are counselors, clergy, grief support groups, and workshops. You can also find materials about the grieving process at your local library, bookstore, or online. We encourage you to find resources that will be helpful to you.

Notes



On the cover: The dove is considered by many to be a sign of hope, love, and freedom. Doves are also a universal symbol of peace and often associated with the holiday season. Some bird lovers report experiencing a feeling of comfort when a mourning dove visits. Others believe that it's a message from a loved one or a reminder of someone who is no longer present in your life but is missed and remembered.