Comfort for the Grieving Heart

October 2026

St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program 484-526-2499

Why We'd Rather Feel Guilty Than Helpless

If you've been replaying the same moment over and over since your loved one died — the phone call you didn't make, the treatment you wonder if you pushed hard enough for, the last conversation you wish had gone differently — you are not alone, and you are not doing anything wrong. You may simply be witnessing your mind do exactly what minds do. This quote by David Kessler is one that speaks to that experience and may be one you can relate to: *"Our mind would always rather feel guilty than helpless."*

The Strange Comfort of Guilt

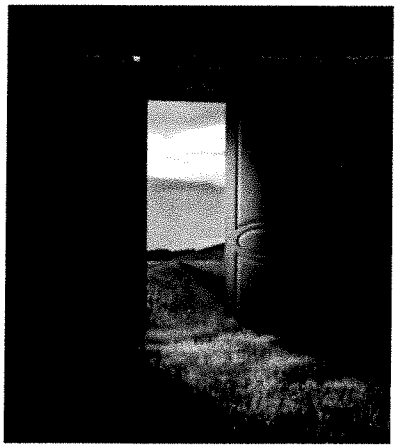
It sounds backwards, doesn't it? Guilt is painful. Why would our minds choose it?

Because guilt, however painful, comes with a hidden promise: *if it was my fault, then I had control.* And if I had control, then perhaps in some other version of events, I could have done something different.

You see, guilt keeps a door open, even a door into the past. And there is a strange comfort in that.

Helplessness offers no such door. Helplessness means the truth was simply this: some illnesses cannot be outrun, some moments cannot be redone, and love — even fierce, devoted love — does not come with the power to prevent death. That is a much harder thing to sit with than "I should have called sooner."

The mind, trying to protect us, often reaches for guilt instead. Guilt feels bad, but it feels *active*. Helplessness just feels, well...like death.



This Is Not a Character Flaw

If you notice yourself building a case against yourself — combing through decisions made months or years ago, judging them by information you only have now in hindsight — know this is an extremely common part of grief, especially after a long illness or a sudden loss. It doesn't mean you did something wrong. It often means you loved someone and could not save them, and your mind is offering you guilt as an alternative to that unbearable, painful fact.

For more information about the services offered by the St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program or if you would like to be added or removed from our mailing list, please contact us at 484-526-2499. Newsletters are also available electronically by calling our office or online at www.sluhn.org (search - Hospice grief)

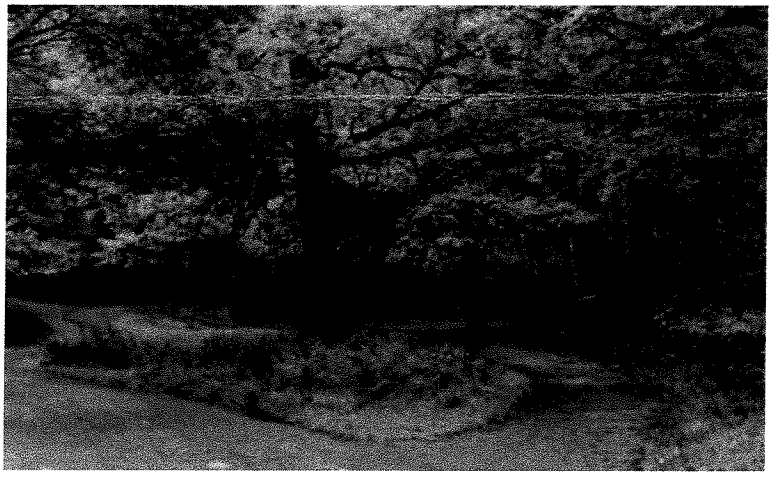
What Can Help

- Name it when it happens. Simply noticing, "This is my mind offering me guilt instead of helplessness," can loosen its grip.
- Ask yourself gently: *Am I judging a decision I made with the information and resources I had at the time? Or am I judging it against a perfect outcome that was never actually available to me?*
- Talk to someone who was there. Other family members, friends, or your hospice bereavement counselor can offer a perspective you cannot see from inside your own guilt.
- Let helplessness be sad instead of shameful. Helplessness in the face of illness and death is not a failure. It is the human condition. Grieving it as a loss — rather than fighting it as a flaw — is often the more honest path through.
- Be as gentle with yourself as you would be with someone you love. If a friend told you the story you tell about yourself, would you believe they had failed? Or would you tell them they had done their best with an impossible situation?

A Gentle Reminder

Learning to tolerate helplessness may be one of grief's most difficult tasks. Not to resolve it, not to explain it away, but to develop the capacity to stand inside, "I could not control this" without immediately needing to convert it into, "therefore it was my fault." That tolerance takes time, patience, and a whole lot of compassion for yourself.

You do not have to have all the answers about what you could have done differently. Sometimes the most loving thing you can do for yourself is to let the guilt soften into grief — and let grief simply be grief, without the extra weight of blame.



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Other Places to Find Support

We encourage you to call the number on the back of your insurance card to find resources paid by your individual insurance plan. Find an individual therapist at psychologytoday.com

Community Bereavement Resources

Bradbury Sullivan LGBT Community Center offers bereavement support for LGBT people who have experienced loss. Visit bradburysullivancenter.org or email at reilly@bradburysullivancenter.org.

Cancer Support Community of the Greater Lehigh Valley provides professional programs of emotional support and education. Visit cancersupportglv.org.

The Compassionate Friends offers ongoing support for parents, grandparents, and adult siblings grieving the loss of a child, grandchild, or sibling. Visit thecompassionatefriends.org. Enter your zip code to locate the local chapter and contact person near you.

Doylestown Hospital Hospice offers a variety of support groups and programs that change seasonally. Visit doylestownhealth.org/hospital/services/bereavement or call 215-345-2079.

Gentle Yoga for Grief, Stress and Life Transitions is currently being offered virtually by Wendy Littner Thompson, M.Ed., LPC, RYT. Visit givinggriefavoice.com or call 610-730-1992. Be sure to indicate if your loved one was a St. Luke's Hospice patient.

GRASP (Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing) currently offers two virtual evening meetings per month, plus an afternoon meeting at the Oasis Center. Call 484-788-9440.

Grief Share is a faith-based support group offered throughout the Lehigh Valley. Visit griefshare.org and enter your zip code to find the contact person and program near you.

Lehigh Valley Health Network offers many groups and services for adults and children between the ages of 6-17. Call 610-402-7481. For information about program offerings in the Pocono area, call 272-762-3826 or email Bryson.Boes@lvhn.org.

OASIS Community Center offers a variety of support groups to those grieving a loss due to substance-related causes. Therapist-led meetings are held in-person and virtually for bereaved parents and young adults (siblings, partners, friends, etc.). Visit oasisbethlehem.org, call 484-747-6825 or email at rhonda@oasisbethlehem.org.

Suicide Loss. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has excellent information on risk factors, statistics, and education about suicide. Visit afsp.org and enter your zip code to find the chapter/contact person near you. All chapters are run by people who have experienced the suicide of a loved one.

Support Information in New Jersey

Karen Ann Quinlan Hospice offers support to those who are grieving the death of a loved one. For more information, call 973-948-2283 or visit karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement.

"Guilt can be released when you find the compassion for yourself to know that you're not in control, and maybe you never were." -David Kessler

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Our Monthly Support Groups

Our bereavement support groups are facilitated by one of our grief counselors. We provide a safe and collaborative space to process your grief journey .

NEW! IMPORTANT—PRE-REGISTRATION WILL BE REQUIRED FOR ALL SUPPORT GROUPS. PLEASE CALL 484-526-2499 TO REGISTER. Groups will be held when 3 or more are registered.

Lehigh Valley Area Support Groups

Trinity Lutheran Church 323 Nazareth Pike, Bethlehem 18020 **10-11:30am: 10/2; 11/6**

Trinity Lutheran Church 323 Nazareth Pike, Bethlehem 18020 **6:30-8pm: 10/13; 11/10**

Brodheadsville Area Support Group

Western Pocono Comm. Library, 131 Pilgrim Way, Brodheadsville 18322 1-2:30pm: **10/14; 11/11**

Carbon/Schuylkill Area Support Group

St. Luke's Lehighton Campus, 211 N. 12th Street, Lehighton PA 18235 1-2:30pm: **10/7; 11/4**

Sellersville Area Support Group

Zwingli UCC Church, 350 Wile Ave, Souderton PA 18964 1-2:30pm: **10/12; 11/9**

INTRODUCING "Walking with Grief" Walking Support Group: Physical activity is a powerful tool in the healing process. The simple practice of walking has been shown to be a healthy outlet for working through difficult emotions. If you are looking for a different outlet to grieve, come join us for our new **Walking with Grief Support Group**. Sometimes we don't just want to talk about it, we want to walk about it. Facilitated by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Team.

Location: Anderson Campus 1872 St. Luke's Blvd, Easton, PA 18045 (Meet at Gazebo near Cancer Center)

Time: 12:00pm - 1:30pm **Dates: Tuesday 10/13; Tuesday 11/10**

This is an outdoor program, dress for the weather. Wear comfortable walking shoes. Bring a water bottle.

Good Grief Workshops

A 90-minute virtual workshop offered monthly to provide you with an introduction to grief. It is informational, interactive, and a good starting point before our in-person support groups. Registration is required and the program Is recommended for those 4-6 weeks out from their loss. For more information, call 484-526-2499.

Join us from 1-2:30pm: Oct. 8; Nov. 5
Join us from 6-7:30pm: Oct. 28; Nov. 18

St. Luke's Senior Meals

St. Luke's University Health Network offers healthy, affordable meals for seniors. It's a great opportunity for a meal for less than $5 and to enjoy meeting new people. Scan the QR code and select **Older Adult Meal Program** for location, days and times.