

Comfort for the Grieving Heart

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

July 2026

Permission to Rest: Grief on "Summer Vacation"

When the world seems to be relaxing and celebrating and you are still carrying loss, giving yourself a "vacation" from grief isn't a betrayal — it's a gift.

Summer arrives whether we are ready for it or not. The days stretch to their longest. Neighbors fire up the grill. Children race through sprinklers. Somewhere down the street, someone is laughing. And you — you are grieving. Perhaps you are wondering why the world didn't get the memo, why it keeps moving at full speed when everything inside you has gone so very still. If that is where you are this season, you are not alone. Though the darkness of winter carries its own challenges, summer can be one of the most quietly difficult times in grief. The contrast between the brightness outside and the weight you carry inside can feel almost cruel. Vacations that were planned together sit uncanceled on the calendar. Family gatherings hold an unmistakably empty chair. Even a simple walk in the evening light can ambush you with a memory. And yet — this season also holds something worth reaching for, even amid loss: It holds the possibility of rest. Not forgetting. Not moving on. Simply rest. Grief doesn't ask for your permission to arrive. But you can choose, when you are ready, to set it down for a little while — the way you might set down a heavy bag to rest your arms.

Why Summer Feels So Hard

Grief is hard in every season, but summer brings its own particular challenges. It is a season saturated with expectation — for joy, for ease, for togetherness. When you are bereaved, those expectations can feel like pressure. You may find yourself performing happiness for others or quietly withdrawing when the celebrations feel like too much. Anniversaries and milestones cluster in summer months for many families: birthdays, weddings, the anniversaries, vacations that will never happen the same way again. These dates don't become easier just because the sun is shining. In fact, sunshine can sometimes make the darkness feel more pronounced and even lonelier. It is also common to feel guilty in summer — guilty for smiling at something beautiful, guilty for enjoying a meal, guilty for having a single afternoon that felt, almost, okay. That guilt is understandable, but can also hold us captive and keep us from fully engaging in the life going on around us and within us.

Signs you may need a "grief vacation"

- You feel exhausted in a way that sleep doesn't fix
- You haven't left the house in several days & have been avoiding people, places, or small joys
- Tears come quickly and unexpectedly and it is becoming harder to bring yourself back
- You feel guilty when you're not thinking about your loved one or the fact that they are gone
 - You sense a longing — however small — for something light, fun, or carefree
 - You realize you haven't laughed in a while
- You find yourself stuck in the same routine or thought cycle that leaves you feeling worse

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What a "Vacation from Grief" Really Means

To be clear: a vacation from grief does not mean pretending your loved one didn't exist. It does not mean you love them less, or that your loss has somehow become smaller. It does not mean you are "over it". It means something much simpler. It means allowing yourself — for an hour, an afternoon, perhaps a whole day — to be present in the world without requiring yourself to actively grieve. It means accepting that laughter, pleasure, and peace are not betrayals of the person you lost. In fact, for many of us, the person we lost would have wanted exactly that for us. Loving someone who has died does not require you to suffer without pause or reprieve. They would likely want you to feel the sun on your face, eat the ice cream cone, and experience moments of joy.

You Are Allowed To Have A Good Day

One of the cruelest tricks of grief is the way it can make us believe that our pain is proof of our love — and that if the pain eases, the love must be fading too. It isn't true. The love does not go anywhere. Grief simply changes shape over time, the way a river eventually finds calmer water without ever ceasing to flow. You are allowed to have a summer that contains both sorrow and sweetness. You are allowed to feel the warmth of the sun even while you miss the person who used to sit beside you. You are allowed to laugh — fully, freely — and return to your grief afterward, not diminished, but perhaps a little restored. Grief is a long journey, and no one can walk it at full intensity every single day. Rest is not retreat. Rest is how we find the strength to keep going.

Practical Ways to Give Yourself Permission

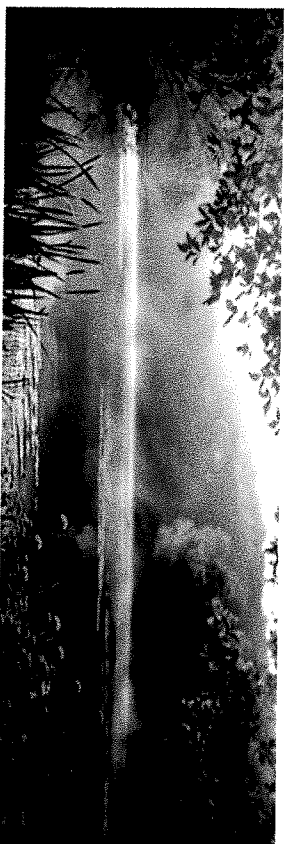
Start very small. A grief vacation doesn't have to look like a beach trip or a party. It might be thirty minutes with a book you've been meaning to read. A walk where you let yourself notice the flowers instead of the heaviness. A meal that you make slowly and eat without rushing. Small pockets of ease count enormously.

Name it out loud. There is something powerful about saying to yourself, "I am going to take a break from grief right now." It is an act of agency, a declaration that you oversee your own healing, even when it feels impossibly slow. You might even tell your loved one, if that feels right: "I'm going to go enjoy the garden for a while. I'll be back."

Let others in. Summer social gatherings can feel daunting, but connection is also part of healing. You do not have to pretend everything is fine. You can simply say, "I'm having a hard summer, but I'm glad to be here." Most people will meet honesty with kindness. And an hour of ordinary human company can loosen something tight inside you.

Create a new ritual. Many people find it helpful to create a small summer ritual in honor of the person they've lost. Light a candle at a certain hour. Plant something in the garden. Keep a chair on the porch in their memory. These small rituals can give grief a contained space — a place it belongs — which makes it easier to step outside of it for a while.

Be gentle with the hard days. Even during a grief vacation, there will be difficult moments. A song on the radio. A smell that takes you back. That is not failure — it is the nature of loss. Simply notice it, let the wave pass, and then return to whatever ease you were building. There is no wrong way to do this.



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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 . **For more information, call us at 484-526-2499.**



IMPORTANT—There will be no support groups in August. Groups will resume in September.

Lehigh Valley Area Support Groups

NEW Location: Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church 323 Nazareth Pike, Bethlehem 18020 **10-11:30am: 7/3, 9/4**

NEW Location: Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church 323 Nazareth Pike, Bethlehem 18020 **6:30-8pm: 7/14, 9/8**

Brodheads ville Area Support Group

Western Pocono Comm. Library, 131 Pilgrim Way, Brodheads ville 18322 **1-2:30pm: 7/22, 9/16**

Carbon/Schuylkill Area Support Group

St. Luke's Lehigh ton Campus, 211 N. 12th Street, Lehigh ton PA 18235 **1-2:30pm: 7/1, 9/9**

Sellersville Area Support Group

Zwingli UCC Church, 350 Wile Ave, Souderton PA 18964 **1-2:30pm: 7/13, 9/14**

Good Grief Workshops

These virtual 90-minute workshops are offered monthly to provide you with a better understanding of what grief is. This workshop is informational, interactive, and a good starting point towards entering our in-person support groups. Sign-up is recommended for those 4-6 weeks out from their loss. For more information, call 484-526-2499.

Join us from 1-2:30pm: July 9, Aug. 20

Join us from 6-7:30pm: July 29, Aug. 12

St. Luke's Senior Meals

St. Luke's University Health Network provides healthy, affordable meals for seniors (65 or older). It's a great opportunity for a great meal at a great price (under \$5 for an entrée, salad, side, veggie, dessert and drink) and enjoy meeting new people. **ALL ARE OFFERED WEEKDAYS ONLY.**

- **Anderson, Carbon, Upper Bucks & Warren Campuses – DINNER 4pm-6pm**
- **Geisinger/St. Luke's—DINNER 4:30pm-6pm**
- **Miner's Campus— LUNCH 11:15am –1:30pm; DINNER 4:15pm-6pm**
- **Monroe Campus—LUNCH 11am-2pm; DINNER 4pm-6pm**



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.

A Hope for You....

This summer, may you find at least one moment — one small, golden moment — that belongs entirely to you. You have earned the right to rest. You have earned the right to feel, however briefly, something other than loss. And when you return to your grief, as you will, you may find it waiting for you gently — a little softer, a little more at peace.

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