

# Bereavement news for people living with grief



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## How to turn grief into joy with an emotional support animal

*"Grief shared is half the grief...Joy shared is double joy." ~ Anon*  
*Excerpts by EsaCare – 9/21/20*

When grief has no words, a pet can provide a level of comfort beyond spoken words. Animals often sense pain and grief. Burying your face in a warm, furry neck communicates your pain and sadness. Communicating your grief is the first step in the healing process.

**Emotional Support Animals (ESAs)** or pets can distract us from our stress, change the mood in a room, bring a smile, and extend an invitation to share meaningful memories. It has been observed that therapy dogs in grief support groups put people at ease in very emotional and difficult situations.

### **Benefits of an ESA:**

ESAs improve mental and physical health. Petting a dog increases serotonin and dopamine levels which decreases anxiety, depression and stress. Just the gentle grooming of your horse, stroking your cat, and patting the head of your favorite canine can trigger the release of a chemical in the brain called oxytocin, which brings peace and calm to the body while lowering blood pressure. Lowering stress levels improves immunity. Pets or ESAs also provide unconditional love, alleviate loneliness, and curb social isolation.

### **When grief shuts us down, ESAs keep us moving**

A nutritious diet and exercise can help during emotional times, but we know the weight of grief may sometimes be paralyzing. Pets and ESAs need daily care. They must be fed, groomed and exercised. We cannot help ourselves we will do what is necessary for our pets. They will be the first to sign up to be your accountability partner too, especially when it comes to going for a morning walk, getting a belly-rub, having some fuel for the journey, or a radiant coat. This also gives you a sense of purpose while you are grieving the pain of loss. A puppy or kitty can make us laugh when all hope seems lost.



## I never said goodbye

I never got the chance to say I love you.  
I never got the chance to say I'll miss you.  
Nobody told me that you were going to die.  
It hurts, I never said Good-Bye.

Where are you now, please talk to me,  
Show yourself and let me see.  
I know that can't happen  
No matter how much I try,  
All I wanted to do is say Good-Bye.

I hope that you are happy wherever you are,  
I have you in my heart no matter how far.  
To the heavens above, I wish I could fly,  
Only to give you a warm Good-Bye.

I will remember you each day that I live,  
You were such a good person  
With so much to give.  
Such a privilege to have known you,  
No one can deny  
I think it might be time to say Good-Bye.

I will keep the good times we shared,  
I want you to know how much I really cared.  
'Til we meet again, on God we must rely,  
I love you, I miss you, and for now, Good-Bye.

## Dealing with social situations following a loss

*Summary of Neptune Society of Northern California - Published 9/25/14.*

Following the loss of a loved one, it is reassuring to know you are not walking this journey alone. It is customary for friends, neighbors, and loved ones to provide many types of support to the family during this difficult time. Grieving families may receive meals, errand assistance, cleaning services, a phone call or a visit. Your support system becomes involved because they love and care about you. Yet, although they mean well a grieving family is not always emotionally prepared or present to receive these unexpected guests.

### How do I manage?

First, be mindful when facing the influx of calls and guests try not to apologize for the fact that you are grieving. If you need time alone, insist on it. See this stride as a means of setting a healthy boundary while trying to manage the pain you are wading through. Real friends will not be offended. They will be waiting for you when you are ready. When you don't feel like talking, shut off the sound on your cell phone or let the answering machine do its job. Consider having a space in your home that is not accessible to visitors. Make it your sanctuary where you can retreat when you need to have some time by yourself.

Remember visitors grieve too. Try to avoid making judgements or becoming angry about the things they might say. Let them grieve alongside you, try to remember they may be feeling many of the same emotions that you are. Spend time companioning one another; reflecting and remembering the life of your loved one.

When attending a community event friends, neighbor's and extended family, may not know what to say or how to act. This may make you uncomfortable. If they begin to linger too long, politely excuse yourself. Having a trusted family member by your side can be a valuable resource in case you become overwhelmed. The person can take over the conversation or help navigate you to a quieter space. Since the funeral, you may be feeling lonely, particularly if your loved one was a part of your everyday life. Many friends and neighbors will not necessarily know when to visit or give you space.

If you are feeling the need for the comradery of a friend, invite them over. Your friends are going to respect your privacy and will not likely call during this time. Just because they don't call doesn't mean they don't care for you, but rather that they want to give you time to grieve. Make your needs known!

Give yourself time to go through the grieving process. After a loved one dies, you may face many common emotions: shock, denial, and anger. These are valid emotions. Give yourself time to visit with them. Surround yourself with people that will help you through the grieving process. Death of a loved one is never easy, but understanding how to deal with the people around you will make it more bearable.

## What to do when someone dies and there was no time for goodbyes

*Summary of the work of Dr. Lou La Grande – Open To Hope*

More frequently, than we imagine death occurs and surviving family members miss the chance to say goodbye to their loved one who has died. Fatal automobile accidents, heart attacks, natural disasters, unexpected events, and recently, COVID-19 which become the catalyst for anxiety and complicated grief.

Many survivors are consumed with guilt, although there is no outward accountability for such an emotion. They did nothing wrong. You did nothing wrong. However, death often wipes out our clarity of mind to see that we did not create the circumstances to cause this guilt to emerge.

Sometimes dying people choose to die when their loved ones are not present to spare them seeing the person's struggle for the last breath. It is not uncommon for a loved one to die in the hospital or hospice when a family member is rapidly in transit for final moment of life so their loved one does not die alone. In our present time, your pain may be escalated by the fact that due to the contagiousness of disease, restrictions at the hospital or facility, or even at home, your last moments with your loved one were through a windowpane.

**How can you reduce emotional pain and provide support when the heart is heavy with sadness?**

**Here are a few suggestions.**

### **Say goodbye in a private setting:**

There is nothing wrong with talking to your loved one who died. It is a beneficial coping response used by millions of people and a meaningful way to say goodbye. Find a quiet room in your home, place a picture or other symbol of your loved one across from you, and say whatever you need to say. Explain why you were not there, why you are sorry, and that your love will always be with that person.

**Plan a Memorial Service to celebrate the life of your loved one and say your goodbyes.** Although, it is important to your subconscious to see the person who has died, it is not always possible. You need to find a means to convince your brain that your loved one has died, so that your heart may tag along when ready. Have a picture of your loved one present as well as, some linking objects that represent the relationship you share.

**Write your goodbyes in your diary or in a letter.** Writing thoughts and descriptions of feelings provides a forum to release physical stress and emotional weariness. Write as though you are speaking directly to your loved one and fill your written conversation with details of your story together. Put I LOVE YOU in it, and that your loved one will never be forgotten. When you are burdened by your thoughts of not saying goodbye, reread what you have written. You may also want to add something to your writing at this time.

**Write or paste messages to your loved one on a biodegradable helium balloon for release.** Watch the balloon ascend to the sky. It will give you a time designed to think of your loved one creating a new ritual or memory for yourself and your family.

**Learn to be mindful of your attention and thoughts.** When guilt and anxiety arise over the unintended circumstance of not being able to say goodbye, change the scenery of your mind. First, believe your loved one understands your inability to say goodbye and doesn't hold a grudge. Try and retrieve a happy memory or visualize you're your loved one forgiving you. This practice begins as a discipline but soon becomes a part of your healing. It is a powerful coping response when guarding against and discharging unwanted thoughts.

You have the ability to say a belated goodbye, let go of anxiety, and recognize that separations without goodbyes happen often, and take a step on the road to reinvesting in life.



# 2025 Bereavement support groups

## July-December

### 2nd Wednesday of the month

10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

**Location:**

Henry Ford Macomb Hospital  
Medical Pavilion – 4th Floor Meeting Room #6  
16151 19 Mile Road  
Clinton Township, MI 48038

Monthly: 7/9, 8/13, 9/10, 10/8, 11/12, 12/10

### 3rd Tuesday of the month

1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

**Location:**

Virtual via Teams

Monthly: 7/15, 8/19, 9/16, 10/21, 11/18, 12/16

### 4th Friday of the month

10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

**Location:**

17333 Federal Drive, Suite 260  
Allen Park, MI 48101

Monthly: 7/25, 8/22, 9/26, 10/24, 11/21, 12/19

### SandCastles children's grief support program

SandCastles offers services in Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties, as well as virtually. Call **313-771-7005** or email [sandcastles@hfhs.org](mailto:sandcastles@hfhs.org) for more information.



### Henry Ford Hospice bereavement services

Offers bereavement support to hospice family members, caregivers and anyone in the community 18 years or older who has experienced the loss of a loved one.

Program offerings include:

- Periodic phone calls
- Monthly newsletters
- Support groups
- Grief education
- One/one support is determined on an individual basis.
- Memorial services
- Community resources/referrals

In general, services last for 13 months, but support can be extended or discontinued. These services are free, with no cost to you.

To learn more about these services please call **586.276.9570** or go to [henryford.com/services/at-home/hospice/support](https://henryford.com/services/at-home/hospice/support).

Henry Ford provides qualified interpreters and other aids and services for the deaf and hard of hearing at no cost.

To request assistance, call Henry Ford bereavement services at 586.276.9570.

A three-day notice is required when requesting an interpreter.