

# JANUARY 2018

## LifePath Hospice Bereavement and Support Group Programs



LIFEPATH  
HOSPICE

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After the loss of a loved one, some survivors may find the pain associated with their loss doesn't lessen with time. Individual grief counseling and support groups provide a safe place to express feelings, share experiences, learn about grief and move ahead in the process. LifePath Hospice provides various support groups and individual counseling. It is our hope that you will take advantage of the programs that best suit your particular needs and circumstances.

You don't have to be the loved one of a LifePath Hospice patient to participate in these support services. We are pleased to offer our programs to anyone residing in Hillsborough County who has experienced the death of a loved one. Preregistration is required for all offerings.

For more information and to register for support groups, please call 813-877-2200.

### **New Beginnings Adult Grief Support Groups**

An eight-week support group for adults grieving the loss of a loved one. For more information, visit the Calendar at [www.chaptershealth.org](http://www.chaptershealth.org) or call 813-877-2200. We make every effort to accommodate your group preference, but please be aware that the group size is limited.

**Thursdays, January 4 – February 15**  
6 – 7:30 p.m., Temple Terrace

**Mondays, January 8 – February 26**  
2 – 3:30 p.m., Sun City Center

**Mondays, January 8 – February 26**  
6 – 7:30 p.m., South Tampa

**Tuesdays, January 9 – February 27**  
6 – 7:30 p.m., Brandon

**Thursdays, January 11 – March 1**  
10 – 11:30 a.m., Memorial Hospital, Tampa

**Thursdays, January 11 – March 1**  
10:30 a.m. – noon, Plant City

**Thursdays, January 11 – March 1**  
2:30 – 4 p.m., Northwest – Carrollwood

### **Ongoing Adult Grief Support Groups**

First Tuesday every month  
**January 2, February 6, 1 – 2:30 p.m., Brandon**

**Wednesdays, January 10 & 24, February 7 & 28**  
2 – 3:30 p.m., Riverview

### **Loss of a Child Due to Addiction Support Group**

Temple Terrace – Call 813-877-2200 for details.

### **Young Adult Support Group**

A support group for young adults, ages 19 to 29. First and third Tuesdays every month  
**January 2 & 16, February 6 & 20**  
6 – 7:30 p.m., South Tampa

### **Suicide Loss Support Group**

Second and fourth Tuesdays every month  
**January 9 & 23, February 13 & 27**  
6 – 7:30 p.m., South Tampa

### **Loss of a Child Support Group**

A weekly group for those grieving the loss of a child  
**Tuesdays, 10 – 11:30 a.m., Temple Terrace**

### **Circle of Love Center**

Ongoing support group meetings for young grievers ages 3 to 18 and their families.

Tuesdays and Thursdays

**January 9 or 11, 23 or 25; February 13 or 15;  
February 27 or March 1; 6 – 7:30 p.m.**

For more info or to register, contact the Circle of Love Center at 813-877-2200.

### **Healing through Volunteering**

Depending upon where you are in your grief journey, you may feel the need to channel your time and energy into something meaningful through the gift of volunteering. There are many ways you can volunteer with LifePath Hospice. For more details, contact Volunteer Services at 813-877-2200 or simply complete the online volunteer application at [www.chaptershealth.org](http://www.chaptershealth.org) to get started, and a volunteer coordinator will contact you.

# Growing Through Grief: The Role Of Support Groups

By Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD

There is a growing realization among those who care for the bereaved that support groups are an appropriate and effective way to help bereaved people heal.

Because they offer a safe place for people to do the work of mourning, support groups encourage members to reconcile their losses and go on to find continued meaning in life and living. Attending a support group facilitated by skilled leaders often brings comfort and understanding beyond many peoples' expectations.

Support groups help bereaved people by:

- Countering the sense of isolation that many experience in our shame-based, mourning-avoiding culture.
- Providing emotional, physical, and spiritual support in a safe, non-judgmental environment.
- Allowing them to explore their many thoughts and feelings about grief in a way that helps them be compassionate with themselves.
- Encouraging members to not only receive support and understanding for themselves but also to provide the same to others.
- Offering opportunities to learn new ways of approaching problems (e.g. the friend or in-law who lacks an understanding of the need to mourn and pushes you to "return to normal").
- Helping them trust their fellow human beings again in what for many in grief feels like an unsafe, uncaring world.
- Providing a supportive environment that can reawaken their zest for life.

In short, as group members give and receive help, they feel less helpless and are able to discover continued meaning in life. Feeling understood by others brings down barriers between the bereaved person and the world outside. This process of being understood is central to being compassionate with oneself as a bereaved person. The more people are compassionate to the bereaved from the outside in, the more the bereaved are capable of being self-compassionate from the inside out.

Our mourning-avoiding culture often forces bereaved people to withdraw from insensitive friends and family or to adopt ways of avoiding the painful, but necessary work of mourning; support groups, which instead foster the experience of trusting and being trusted, can do wonders in meeting the needs of bereaved people. In an effective bereavement support group, members can achieve a balance between giving and receiving, between independence and an appropriate, self-sustaining dependence. The group provides a safe harbor where hurting people can pull in, anchor while the wind still blows them around, and search for safe ground on which to go on living. As a potential leader of such a group, you have the honor of accompanying people during this time.

Before we go on to explore the specifics of running a bereavement support group, though, I would like to further define what I mean by growing through grief.

**Growth means encountering pain.** The death of someone loved naturally brings about emotional, physical, and spiritual pain for us as human beings. Forums such as support groups provide us with a safe place where we can embrace our pain in "doses." Encountering the pain of the loss all at once would overwhelm us and leave us defenseless. Sometimes bereaved people need to distract themselves from the pain of the loss, while at other times they need a "safe harbor" to pull into and embrace the depth of the loss.

**Growth means change.** My experience has taught me that we as human beings are forever changed by the death of someone in our lives. To "resolve" your own or someone else's grief often denotes a return to a homeostasis (inner balance) that was present prior to the death. I believe this model of care is inadequate and often damaging to bereaved people of all ages.

A "return to inner balance" doesn't reflect how I, or the people who have taught me about their grief journeys, are forever changed by the experience of bereavement. In using the word growth, I acknowledge the changes that mourning brings about.

**Growth means a new inner balance with no end points.** While the bereaved person may do the work of mourning to recapture in part some sense of inner balance, it is a new inner balance. My hope is that the term growth reflects the active, ongoing process of mourning.

**Growth means exploring our assumptions about life.** The encounter with grief reawakens us to the importance of utilizing our potentials. The concept of potential in this context could be defined as our capacity to mourn our losses openly and without shame, to be interpersonally effective in our relationships with others, and to continue to discover fulfillment in life, living and loving. Loss often serves as a catalyst to becoming more of what we can be instead of staying exactly what and where we are. Loss seems to educate the potential within. Then, it becomes up to us as human beings to embrace and creatively express this potential. Growth is about not settling for homeostasis, but looking for and seeking out how we are changed by this death. Growth means discovering our gifts, our potentials, and using them to bring meaning to the lives of others.

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*This article is excerpted from Dr. Wolfelt's book "How to Start and Lead a Bereavement Support Group," available from Companion Press.*