

LIFT

Grief is a process, not a state. –Anne Grant

October 2020

Bereavement Newsletter

Living Is For Today

West Texas Rehab's Hospice of San Angelo

HOSA'S BEREAVEMENT SERVICES ADAPT TO CHALLENGES OF COVID-19

OUR MAIN MESSAGE IS WE ARE STILL AVAILABLE , INCLUDING IN NEW WAYS.

Thanks to your interest in an online support group, we're doing it! Our first group is scheduled for Thursday, October 22, 1:00-2:00 pm. Participation is possible via computer, device, or phone – cell or landline. Please contact Karen Schmeltekopf at kschmeltekopf@wtrc.com or 325-658-6524 for information about participating. We look forward to “seeing” you and appreciate your willingness to experiment with us!

On-line Navigating the Holidays Workshop

It seems like this has been one of the longest years ever, so it's amazing to realize the holidays are but weeks away. Holidays can be a very difficult time when one is grieving, and this year will have unique challenges all its own. HOSA is offering a special opportunity to learn more about “navigating” the holidays and how to deal with all those “festive opportunities” while grieving – whether it's the first holiday season without your loved one or the 10th. Save the date now: Tuesday, November 10, 5:30-7:00 pm. Again, participation is possible in many ways. Contact kschmeltekopf@wtrc.com, 325-658-6524 for more information.

Bereavement care is one of the pillars of services West Texas Rehab's Hospice of San Angelo has offered since its inception 35 years ago. During that time, HOSA's Bereavement Team has served to meet the needs of the people in its 15-county area and has adapted to meet the many challenges confronting it along the way.

Bereavement Counselor and Social Worker Ervilene Kuhlmann, LCSW, has seen most of the changes in her 24 years with Hospice of San Angelo. She recalls when she first began working at HOSA, in December 1995, that the Monthly Luncheon had already been established. The support group Hands Together was meeting two evenings a month at Southland Baptist Church. Annual events included Help for the Holidays, the Candlelight Memorial Service, and the Light Up A Life tree lighting, which had been moved from a tree outside Park 2400 to the lobby of the Cactus Hotel. Then HOSA acquired the Landy House, and the Bereavement Team had a home. They added another support group, Caring Hearts, which began meeting there weekly at mid-day.

Bereavement activities spilled out into the community with a weekly mall-walking group and with annual events, such as the Artistry of Life Celebration at the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts and the workshop now known as Navigating the Holidays. The team added community fundraisers, pet-loss memorials, and community grief education support groups. And Building Bridges – HOSA's program for grieving children and their families, which had been established in 1989 -- was in full swing, offering two six-week sessions annually.

In the past year, the Bereavement Team has had to confront two huge challenges. First, a fire significantly damaged the Landy House in December 2019 and the Bereavement Team moved into HOSA offices at the Cactus Hotel. Then, in March 2020, COVID-19 forced everyone into isolation, limiting in-person contact and fraying the social safety net.

Ervilene says that, while the Bereavement Team is acknowledging the grief from the aftermath of these two events, it is important to put the present into perspective.

The Team Members are now working from home and partially from the Cactus. They are having one-on-one telephone calls or virtual visits with their clients. There are, of course, no support groups or luncheons or activities at this time.

While COVID-19 has affected everyone in a variety of ways, the sense of loss has been very prominent and has resulted in a nationwide collective grief. However, those whose loved ones have died in the midst of the many COVID-19 restrictions are struggling with a more complicated grief. It is difficult enough to grieve the death of a loved one in “usual” circumstances; it is even more difficult in isolation when family members are unable to be with their loved one before or during their last moments. Adding to this emotional challenge is the inability or lack of the traditional rituals of visitations, funerals, memorials or shivas, as well as shared meals that help survivors say goodbye while receiving the comfort and support of family and friends.

As the Bereavement Team of HOSA has adapted to meet the challenges of grief over the past 35 years, we continue to brainstorm ways to provide care for individuals and families who are grieving in the midst of COVID-19.

Our main message is we are still available to you to visit by phone or Telehealth. The bereavement staff knows and understands the emotional and physical pain of grief. We also know that it is very helpful to be able to talk to someone safe who can listen and who truly cares.

Challenges are not new to the members of HOSA’s Bereavement Team. The mission is the same it has always been – to walk the grief journey with you.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP TO OVERCOME GRIEF

By Pfizer Medical Team, accessed at gethealthystayhealthy.com

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Sometimes grief can interfere with a person’s ability to function in his or her daily life (known as complicated grief). Consider talking with your healthcare provider if, over time, you:

- Have trouble carrying out your normal routines.
- No longer want to participate in social activities.
- Feel depressed or deeply sad.
- Blame yourself or feel guilty.
- Believe that you did something wrong or could have prevented the death.
- Feel like you’ve lost your sense of purpose in life.
- Feel life isn’t worth living anymore

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