

Honoring a Year of Loss

Acknowledging grief and creating space for hope

BY MELISSA ALLEN, MSW, LCSW, LUMINA BEREAVEMENT COORDINATOR

In our work supporting grieving people, we invite them to share and name their losses. What has been particularly significant in this last year is that, beyond honoring and acknowledging the people in our lives who have died, we find the need to name a variety of other losses that we have experienced due to the pandemic. We are grieving the loss of a funeral, memorial or ritual, or the loss of family and friends visiting and providing support after a death. We are grieving the loss of meaningful social connections like church or men’s groups, missing grandkids, concerts, volunteering, and book clubs. We are missing meaningful milestones like graduations, weddings and family reunions. This has been a year filled with loss—for all of us.



Activity used in Family Grief Group to demonstrate the weight of grief.

Many of us have known someone who died this year, and that loss was made even more difficult by the loss of the traditional ways we grieve and process. If you didn’t experience a death directly, you were hearing about death rates daily. Most of us have felt a loss of safety or a loss of our assumptive world—the world we assumed would be there providing us with routine, structure and continuity.

Grief is any reaction to a loss. It can impact us physically, emotionally, spiritually, cognitively and socially. You

Be kind to yourself as you allow yourself to feel the weight of this past year and give yourself credit for carrying this heavy load.



may find yourself feeling fatigued, foggy-brained, achy, lonely, sorrowful, or angry. It can be quite difficult to find ways to honor and acknowledge

our losses when we are solely focused on staying safe and adapting to an ever-changing world.

There is an exercise we use in our Family Grief Group to help kids visualize the work of grief. We ask them to put on a large vest with extra pockets, and we invite them to share their internal grief reactions. With each reaction that they share, we place a small bag of sand into one of the pockets. This is our way of taking the internal reactions to grief and moving them onto the outside of our body. As the weight of the vest increases, we ask the kids what it feels like to wear this vest. “It’s so heavy,” “I feel awkward,” and “I feel unsure of myself,” are some common responses.

This exercise comes to mind as we realize that each of us is wearing a vest, heavy with the losses of this past year. These heavy vests can be lightened when we find ways to acknowledge and honor our grief. The act of mourning—moving the grief up and out of our bodies—allows us to slowly lessen the weight of our losses. When we share our stories, verbalize our losses with others who understand, journal, create art, cry, and

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How to Help Grief Soften

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1 participate in rituals, we begin to move the grief up and out. Gradually, our vests can become lighter and a bit easier to carry.

We invite you to think about the losses you have experienced this year. What are you carrying in your vest? When we name our losses and acknowledge them, we can begin the process of mourning for what has been lost and make room for new experiences. Be kind to yourself as you allow yourself to feel the weight of this past year and give yourself credit for carrying this heavy load. ✨


We know that grief softens when we move it up and out. Here a few healthy ways to honor your grief:


 **Express it.** Find ways to release your feelings: cry in the shower, journal, talk with a friend who is a good listener, create art. Grief softens when it is allowed to move up and out of our body. Mourning is healthy and useful.

 **Ritualize it.** Large gatherings are not an option right now, but there are smaller ways we can honor and make space to remember our losses. Light a candle, make a special meal, host an online memorial, plant something in memory of or talk out loud to the person you are grieving.


"You can't hide your grief. You have to let it out; you have to lean into it and face it in a positive, supportive environment in order to come out the other side as a whole person."


~ Past Lumina Grief Group Participant


 **Seek support.** Grief counseling and grief support groups are two places where you can openly express your thoughts and feelings around loss. Being with others who have also experienced loss can help normalize your reactions and provide encouragement. Grief can be a very isolating experience. Finding community is helpful.

 **Rest.** The work of grief is heavy and hard. Compounded loss, and the weight of grief, can make the daily tasks of life feel extra challenging. Loss activates 'flight or fight' and, therefore, requires a great deal of energy. Allow yourself to rest; to be still. Cocooning and creating safety

and peace for yourself can be a very nurturing way to signal to your body that you are safe.

 **Take breaks from grief.** Schedule something that sounds nice to you. Sip a cup of tea, go outside, watch a funny show, chat with a friend. Being intentional about adding good into our life provides us with the fuel and energy we need to continue the work of grief.

 **Do good.** It can be helpful in times of grief to think beyond ourselves and do something good for someone else. This reminds us of our worth and value, and connects us to the world around us. Drop a kind note on someone's front porch, compliment someone, reach out and share a kind word with someone who has impacted your life.

 **Be kind to yourself.** Think about how you would comfort someone else in need and give this to yourself. Speak nicely to yourself, move a bit slower, lower your expectations just a bit. Eat a food that is comforting to you.

We are here for you. Free grief support is available to anyone in the community thanks to generous donations and grants. Please reach out if you would like to learn more about available grief support options at Lumina by emailing grief@luminahospice.org or calling our office at 541.757.9616 and asking for the Grief Support Coordinator. ✨

OPEN HEART MEMORIAL

We invite you to name and acknowledge losses you've experienced by submitting them to the Open Heart Community Memorial at luminahospice.org/openheart

MORE INFORMATION ON PAGE 4.

GENEROUS HEARTS

BY ELIZABETH FRENCH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We recently celebrated Volunteer Appreciation Month which caused me to reflect, once again, on the tremendous contribution volunteers make to Lumina. Quite simply, they rock! There's just no other way to say it.



Our volunteers—all 100 of them—are a critical part of our interdisciplinary care. I am constantly humbled by their generous hearts. From providing

much-needed respite to overwhelmed caregivers, to building ramps so patients can safely stay in their homes, or recording patient stories, providing pet care, sitting vigil with a dying patient, creating flower arrangements, knitting cozy shawls or blankets, and much more, we simply could not deliver our mission without the support of our dedicated volunteers.

In addition to those who have direct patient responsibilities, many volunteers provide administrative support or generously share their professional skills and experience by serving on committees or task forces. Lumina's Board of Directors is also 100% volunteer, and these individuals steer the ship as we grow and change in response to the many demographic, regulatory, and market pressures we face. Our Board ensures Lumina's operation is focused on our mission, that we carry out our services consistent with our values and that our vision remains relevant. I am so thankful for their guidance and support.

I have profound gratitude for the gift of time and talent our volunteers bring to Lumina and am honored to be on the Lumina journey with you. ✨

We celebrate our Lumina volunteers!

Our volunteers are a critical part of what makes Lumina special. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, they remain dedicated and support our mission in countless ways.

We celebrated National Volunteer Appreciation Week with a COVID-friendly drive through event. In true Oregon fashion, it was a rainy day, but our volunteers always bring sunshine.

Thank you to all of our amazing volunteers!

If you are interested in becoming a Lumina volunteer, email outreach@luminahospice.org for more information.



Drive-thru Volunteer Appreciation Event

OUR CAREGIVER SUPPORT, GRIEF SUPPORT AND END-OF-LIFE EDUCATION ARE AVAILABLE FREE TO ALL IN THE COMMUNITY.

To learn more about any of our available programs, contact us:

- » Grief support: grief@luminahospice.org
- » Caregiver support: caregiver@luminahospice.org
- » Event information: Email outreach@luminahospice.org for updates on the Illuminating Series or to be added to our email list.

 Visit our Facebook page [@luminahospice](https://www.facebook.com/luminahospice)

THANKS TO OUR GENEROUS COMMUNITY OF DONORS who make Lumina's programming possible. To support Lumina, visit luminahospice.org/donate



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Open Heart Community Memorial

This year we have all experienced loss – loss of a person, connection with family and friends, meaningful activities, a sense of safety, or other losses.

We invite you to name and acknowledge your losses by submitting them to the *Open Heart Community Memorial* at luminahospice.org/openheart

Each submission will be written on a ribbon and tied on a large heart sculpture. Together the ribbons and heart will honor and help soften the collective grief in our community.

The *Open Heart Community Memorial* will be on display June 26th from 10 am to 2 pm at Starker Arts Park in Corvallis. All current COVID-19 protocols will be observed.

All are welcome, but you do not need to attend the community viewing in order to make a submission.

Submissions can be made at luminahospice.org/openheart

Thank you to our generous donors who make our bereavement programming possible.