

Find support at Alton Memorial when dealing with grief

by Brittany Kohler, Content Manager
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Grief Loss Change Support Group Meets Two Nights Per Month

"He who lacks time to mourn, lacks time to mend."

-- William Shakespeare

At some point in life everyone must deal with loss — whether that loss is health, a loved one, a pet, a job or a marriage. And when you lose something, it's natural to go through grief, says Eileen Cheatham, RN, BSN, parish nurse and the new facilitator of the Grief /Loss/Change (GLC) Support Group at Alton Memorial Hospital.

Yet grief is not predictable.

“The stages of grief are as numbered as the people who go through loss,” Cheatham says. “It's very individual and fluid. While the gold standard of grief — as explained by Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross -- is broken into five stages, people rarely follow those steps in order. They may go forward, then take two steps back. The mission of our group is to provide a safe place to come and talk about your loss, your loved one and tell your story as often as necessary.”

Grief can cause a wide range of emotions, from anger to deep sadness.

“We take a holistic approach to grief,” Cheatham says. “It can affect your body, mind and spirit. It's important to accept your emotions and allow yourself the time you need to grieve so you can begin to heal.”

Cheatham is assuming the role of GLC facilitator from Judy Roth, an AMH parish nurse who is retiring this summer. The GLC group started in 1999 after Roth and other parish nurses noted many people were dealing with grief without support.

“Grief is even harder if you don't have much support from family or friends available locally,” Roth says.

GLC offers both a chance for people to share and an educational component covering topics within the context of grief, such as the grief process, coping mechanisms and interventions that can help — like music and journaling. Roth says the group averages from two to eight people at each meeting who range in age from their 20s to their 80s. Some come just a handful of times; others come for a few years.

Two trained facilitators attend each meeting. The GLC team includes a faith community nurse, a Stephen Minister, a chaplain, a social worker and a bereavement specialist from BJC Hospice of Alton.

“Everything is confidential in the group and all voices are equal and important — members give and take,” Cheatham says. “The strength of the group comes from participation and support. People learn from each other and, hopefully, pick up pearls that help them. They may realize that, ‘Yes, I went through that, too.’ The group is a place to talk, tell your story and have others willing to listen. Grief waxes and wanes.

Being able to verbalize one's grief is very therapeutic, and so is helping and supporting someone else."

Roth is inspired by the people she has helped through GLC.

"It's good to see people relearn how to live their lives and be happy again without their loved ones, while still honoring and remembering those loved ones," she says.

GLC Support Group meetings are held the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month from 6 to 7:30 p.m. in the large classroom on the third floor of Alton Memorial Hospital's Smith Wing. Follow the signs from the Duncan Wing Lobby. Participants can join the group at any point. For more information, call Cheatham at 618-463-7117.