

# Calvary in Touch

## Greetings

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We have all been tasked with finding drastically different ways to navigate our lives and even the simplest of tasks in the midst of this pandemic. A lot of our energy right now is focused on adapting and adjusting. As we do this, it's good to notice that we are all experiencing a collective grief in so many different ways.

We have devoted the majority of this issue naming some of the things you may be experiencing.

It's so important to name our experiences and give them some space to be known. We also wanted to share with you some of the sweetest wisdom coming straight from one of our children, a reminder, for me, of the hope and love that keeps us all moving despite our great challenges.

*Maria Georgopoulos, LMHC, FT  
Director of Bereavement Services*

## Spotlight On : It's All Grief: COVID And Layers Of Loss

The COVID-19/Coronavirus pandemic has hit the globe like a whirlwind. The impact of the novel illness has not only been affecting people physically but bringing up numerous mental and social issues as governments, communities, and individuals try to cope with the far reaching toll of the virus. Large cities such as New York and Los Angeles have their residents sheltering in place and people all over the country are encouraged to physically distance themselves in order to decrease the spread of the virus. School buildings have closed as classrooms are moved to virtual platforms, millions of Americans are now laid off, and hospitals are overwhelmed with an increased need for life saving support and how to accommodate more critical patients. There are almost no words to describe the many losses taking place and the surreal aspects of this moment in time. Grief in its most simple definition is a reaction to a loss, death related or non-death related. It is felt almost daily and for many people, grief adds up and multiplies rapidly as their environments, routines and social structures change. What many are finding is that grief is being felt along a wide spectrum. There should be no shame in talking

about the variety of experiences individuals, young and old, are having during this time. Through news and social media outlets we are bombarded with the grief of health professionals as they work tirelessly to help the sick... often losing the battle. We hear and see families and friends mourning the deaths of loved ones they were not able to see in hospitals, nursing homes, and penitentiaries. Financial burdens swamp households as many are forced to stay home unpaid. It can be easy to place these situations and aspects of grief, as important as they are, in a hierarchy that does not allow the acknowledgement of other losses during this time. Somewhere guardians are frazzled because children with special needs have had their schedules interrupted, a couple's birth plan is disrupted, a senior student has several milestone events unexpectedly cancelled and an individual with few social connections feels isolated and alone. And more issues still: the grief of losing purpose when there is no longer a place of work to travel to, the grief of missing self-care activities like hair appointments,

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## Spotlight On: *It's All Grief: COVID And Layers Of Loss* (Continued from page 1)

the grief of losing feelings of safety and security in a time where the unknown looms. They all hold value. In many ways, the various griefs caused by COVID-19 parallel what griever have been saying for years about the deaths of special persons. There is no sense of control and people who feel out of control express their grief in many ways. Cognitively there can be a loss of concentration, forgetting of tasks, many idle hours scanning the internet not retaining much information, and a need for technological screen time to escape. Physically there can be more headaches, uneasiness in the pits of stomachs, and increased anxiety which can manifest physically and cognitively. Emotionally, feelings of anger, frustration, and fear may present as new challenges arise.

For many, less talked about feelings develop, like guilt. Some face the privilege of being able to work when many cannot, and others are able to retreat to homes that they consider safe spaces in contrast with others who must stay in spaces where they are abused or battered. There are individuals who feel the grief of no choice, as they risk unsafe conditions at work versus risking financial stability. Many feel inadequate and less productive as they struggle to keep up with daily changes and stressors. Grief can be layered and complicated with no particular aspect existing on its own. It's possible to experience one and numerous manifestations of grief at once. Loss may also compound as individuals find their regular mechanisms of coping inaccessible or not comforting while trying to meet the challenges of the day.



Amidst all these aspects of grief lies another core experience and question for many griever of death related loss. Will there ever be 'normal' again? For griever the answer is often no as they begin their journey to find what the new normal will be. Although anticipative that cases of COVID-19 will decline, the virus will be further studied and cured, it can be argued that this pandemic has left its imprint in the American psyche. As individuals experience different losses they can also reflect on what they have discovered about self or communities. Sometimes compassion is what is found as people band together to offer one another support. It can be the ingenuity that was discovered under the most trying of times like planning a virtual funeral or the hope that arose when a desperately needed connection was made at just the right time.

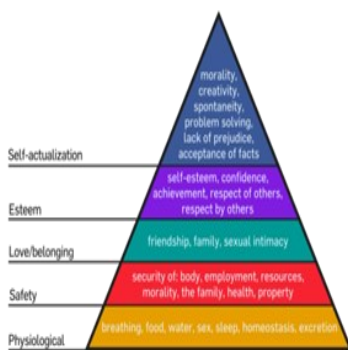
In grief there can be the need to make meaning but there is also no rush to make meaning. For some, the whys of grief may always outweigh answers received. It's ok to recognize and name the losses that are impacting your own life. For a moment, forget comparing them to that of others and just let yourself be and feel. In many ways we're all grieving. In these times let's not forget to support one another. Instead of analyzing and creating hierarchies of loss, let's focus on how to stay connected and validate each other in the most vulnerable parts of our personal experiences. It's all grief.

*Rashida Sanchez, MA, FT  
Bereavement Services*

## Spotlight On: *A Word about COVID and Your Grief*

In light of our world's current public health crisis, we as mental health professionals want to acknowledge just how challenging these times are for everyone. Our planet has been disrupted by grief that none of us expected. In a recent article by David Kessler, he explains that all of this discomfort we are feeling is grief. He is right. We are grieving the loss of certainty, routine, predictability, safety, and physical interaction. Some individuals are grieving the loss of their job and income and some, the loss of a loved one, sometimes more than one loved one. Our daily lives and schedules have been turned upside down by COVID-19. Couples are forced to cancel and reschedule their weddings, parents are scrambling to find formula for their babies, children are stuck in front of screens to learn, and working adults everywhere are adapting to working from home. If you find yourself more tired than ever, more forgetful, irritated, angry, and/or hopeless, Calvary Hospital's Bereavement Department wants you to know this: it's okay to not be okay right now.

A pandemic such as this one will undoubtedly shift our priorities. It's important that we pay attention to our needs and how they may change from day to day. Some of you may be familiar with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. Abraham Maslow was a humanistic American psychologist whose theory suggests that human needs



can only be achieved one level at a time. For example, one must satisfy their physiological needs before moving towards other needs such as relationships, love, belonging, and education. During a public health crisis, priorities shift. It may be difficult to focus on one's education when you've just been furloughed and are unsure of

how you will pay rent. It's crucial to be gentle with yourself during this time. It may feel like you're in survival mode and therefore, burning out faster. Have compassion for yourself and others as needs change, priorities shift, and as we adapt to our new routines.

For individuals who are grieving, COVID-19 may have thrown a wrench into their process. Many individuals feel as though their grief has been paused because they are too focused on the virus right now. Some of our group members express how unfair it is that they cannot give full attention to their deceased loved one. Some individuals express guilt that they are not thinking about their significant someone as often as they did before the virus. This is a very normal reaction to the world's current climate; but while it is normal, it may open up the possibility

of delayed grief. Delayed grief is a grief that individuals don't fully experience until some time after the loss. While there can be a myriad of factors that go into why this occurs, when we talk about delayed grief during COVID-19, it is clear. The world is collectively focused on staying healthy, avoiding contamination, and dealing with the anxiety of it all. Therefore, we may not feel like we have time, brain power, or permission to grieve properly. We know it's hard to juggle everything right now and it is okay if you find yourself putting your grief on hold right now.

Whether you were grieving the death of a loved one before the pandemic began, or are feeling the grief that accompanies the way the world is now, understand that it helps to focus on things we *can* control. We can limit how much news we watch. We can be mindful of our breath and practice deep breathing. We can meditate, journal, create art, and exercise. Finding things that you enjoy and are easy and safe for you are important to help balance your mindset. Remember, a pandemic should not be seen as an opportunity to start a new hobby, learn a new skill, or to better your skills if you simply cannot find the motivation within you. Getting through each day is an accomplishment on its own. We are living through a time that will, without a doubt, have lasting effects on not only our grief, but our mental health and clarity. With the breadth of our collective knowledge and skills, we intend to be there every step of the way to aid in this journey of our community and its members. Take good care of yourself and stay safe.



*Stephanie Insalaco, MA, MHC-LP  
Bereavement Counselor*



## *Spotlight On: Supporting Our Community & Calvary Family*

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As bereavement counselors working for Calvary Hospital, we have been responding to the needs of the community and our colleagues in ways we never anticipated. Counselors rotate shifts at the hospital to provide emotional support for the staff. We engage the nurses and CCTs in daily activities that encourage them to articulate their needs and how they care for themselves after they spend their days and nights taking care of others. Due to the Department of Health's prohibition on hospital visitors unless a patient is critical, counselors are going into patient rooms and connecting them with their family members via FaceTime or Zoom. Our department is also working with ArchCare by reaching out to the bereaved families of loved ones who died in recent days and weeks to offer support and inform them of our services. We've moved our support groups online using Zoom and meet with our adult groups weekly and our children's groups biweekly. Our team created a Children's Packet and Toolkit for our younger members and their guardians. It lets the

children know that we are still here for them and gives the guardians some tools on managing this crisis. We are fielding emails and calls from the public requesting bereavement services. We moved our Annual Course online, to make sure that adult learners still receive their continuing education credits, increasing the number of mental health professionals who are informed about grief. And perhaps most importantly, we've implemented an additional support group specifically for individuals grieving a loved one who died of COVID-19. This online group is being facilitated by the Director of Bereavement Services at Calvary Hospital, Maria Georgopoulos. Please check our website [www.calvaryhospital.org](http://www.calvaryhospital.org) for updates regarding groups and services.

*Stephanie Insalaco, MA, MHC-LP  
Bereavement Counselor*

## *Spotlight On: We Welcomed Spring*

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Our annual family party took place March 1 and brought together 100 children and guardians to usher in spring and a time of renewal. "March Through Memories" featured a museum of photos and families were encouraged to talk about memories associated with them. Small pots filled with soil and zinnia seeds were given to each person to decorate and take home. Jahlia F., a Brooklyn Tween, sent us a picture of her plant in mid-April, with this description:

"We were given seeds to plant at the annual Bereavement Party at Calvary Hospital. I watered it and nurtured the plant everyday and took care of it to remind me of how my dad took care of me every day. I also wrote my dad's name along with mine on it to signify the special bond we had. I will continue to care for it as long as I can and watch it blossom into a beautiful plant."

*Abby Spilka, MA, CT, MHC-LP  
Bereavement Counselor*



# Monthly Calendar

## BRONX GROUPS

Calvary Hospital  
1740 Eastchester Road  
Bronx, NY 10461

Adult Death of a Child  
2nd, 3rd & 4th Thursday: Sherry  
12:30 pm - 2:00 pm

Death of a Child  
Wednesday: Joanne  
1:00 pm - 2:30 pm  
Wednesday: Jacqueline  
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

Adult Death of a Parent  
Thursday: Melanie  
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm  
Thursday: Joanne  
5:15 pm - 6:45 pm

Death of a Sibling  
Tuesday: Joanne  
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

Death of a Spouse/Partner  
Tuesday: Joanne  
1:00 pm - 2:30 pm  
Monday: Joanne  
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Death of a Young Spouse/Partner  
Wednesday: Joanne  
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

Spanish Speaking Group  
Wednesday: Yvette  
12:30 pm - 2:00 pm

Precious Moments for Children  
Ages 6 - 9  
Tuesday: Jacqueline  
2:00 pm - 3:30 pm  
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

In Be-tween Ages 10 - 12  
Thursday: Jacqueline  
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Teen Group Ages 13 - 17  
Thursday: Jacqueline  
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

Men's Discussion Group  
1st Thursday: Sherry  
12:30 pm - 2:00 pm

## BROOKLYN GROUPS

St. Joseph High School  
80 Willoughby Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Precious Moments Ages 6 - 9  
Tuesday: Rashida  
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

In Be-tween Group Ages 10 - 12  
Tuesday: Samantha  
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm  
Thursday: Abby  
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Teen Group Ages 13 - 17  
Wednesday: Rashida  
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Death of a Spouse/Partner  
Thursday: Rashida  
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Death of a Young Spouse/Partner  
Thursday: Abby  
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Adult Death of a Parent  
Tuesday: Rashida  
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Death of a Child  
Monday: Rashida  
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm  
Tuesday: Abby  
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Death of a Sibling  
TBD  
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Young Adult Group  
Wednesday: Abby  
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Mindfulness & Movement for  
Grief  
Wednesday: Samantha  
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Living with Spouse/Partner Loss  
Grief 2 Years and Beyond  
1st Monday: Abby  
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

What Now? Adults Grieving the  
Death of a Parent 2 Years &  
Beyond  
2nd Monday: Abby  
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

## MANHATTAN GROUPS

Terence Cardinal Cooke Health  
Care Center  
1249 Fifth Avenue 9th Floor  
New York, NY 10029

Precious Moments  
for Children Ages 6-9  
Wednesday: Stephanie  
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

In Be-tween Group Ages 10-12  
Wednesday: Melanie  
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Teen Group  
Wednesday: Stephanie  
4:30 pm - 6:00 pm

Death of a Parent  
Wednesday: Melanie  
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Death of a Spouse/Partner  
Monday: Stephanie  
11:00 am - 12:30 p.m.  
Thursday: Stephanie  
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Death of a Young Spouse/Partner  
Tuesday: Melanie  
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

COVID-19 Bereavement Group  
Thursday: Maria  
1:00 pm-2:30 pm

***Please make a note: You must call to schedule an appointment prior to attending any of our groups. We do not accept walk-ins.***

## MEMORIAL SERVICES

Bronx Christian  
Bronx Jewish  
Brooklyn Christian  
Brooklyn Jewish

**Due to COVID-19 there are no Memorial Services at this time.**

**All groups are free & open to the community. Please call to schedule an appointment**

## Contacts

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## Tree of Life



*Calvary Hospital complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex.*

Through the Tree of Life, we can recognize your significant naming gift in a permanent and meaningful manner. Your loved one's name will exist in perpetuity with the lifetime of the Hospital.

This a loving way of memorializing someone special to you or saying thank you, because your gift of love helps patients and families today and for many years to come.

For more information on the Tree of Life, contact Sandrina Fernandez at **718-518-2039**.

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