

Journey

Fall 2025

A grief community publication
from Northern Illinois Hospice



follow us  

In this issue:

2 From Our Rockford Bereavement
Coordinator

2025 Bereavement Support Groups

3 Growing Around Grief

Accentuate the Positive

The Shifting Nature of Grieving

By Jen Conley, LPC LPMT

Grief is often unpredictable in nature, coming in unexpected ways and unanticipated times. It is an exceedingly complex emotional experience, and of course, heartrending. First and foremost, continue to remember to be gentle and non-judging of yourself. You are doing the best that you can. Also, let your feelings evolve naturally, don't try and force yourself to feel a certain way.

With time, our grief tends to shift. That does not mean as bereaved we "get over" the loss, but with time we begin to become reconciled with the truth of it. As such, we must learn to navigate this new landscape without our beloved. This requires courage, learning,

and effort. In addition, you may still feel exhausted as grieving is truly hard work. Be patient with yourself, and know that this inconsistent experience of grief is what most people experience.

There is a wonderful model and graphic by researcher Lois Tonkin. She states we often have the impression grief will lessen with time, in truth, our grief stays the same, but we grow larger around it. Our new experiences, connections, and "being" in the world incorporate our loss. The grief is present, but not necessarily always the focus...we learn to hold both our sorrow and our gladness.



First in *caring* for life's final months

Story continues on page 3

From Our Rockford Bereavement Coordinator



It appears the holiday season starts earlier each year. In August, pumpkins and ghosts line store shelves before school begins. By late September, red and green appear in store windows. For those grieving, the season may feel like a form of torture. Forced festivity can cause knots in your stomach at parties or family events. Seeing costumes, candy, and decorated trees may make you want to crawl under the bed and stay there until January 2.

How can you find the strength to face the surge of good cheer? How might you even muster a smile during the holidays? Here are a few suggestions to ease the tension. First, forgo tradition. The absence of your beloved person may feel unbearable. The empty seat at the table, recreating your grandmother's turkey stuffing, or decorating the tree while Andy Williams croons carols in the background, can hurt. Instead, shake things up. Try having a buffet in a different room or invite new people to your party. Or order Chinese food or pizza instead of traditional fare. Changing your celebration can help ease the pain of not having your person there.

Next, have an exit plan. If you're invited somewhere, think about how you will leave if it feels overwhelming. If you're comfortable, let your host know the holidays are hard and you'll play things by ear. Or decline the invitation. Don't feel guilty if you don't attend every event you're invited to this year. It's alright to prioritize your needs, not what others expect.

Another suggestion is don't be afraid to talk to somebody. Acknowledging that this year will likely feel different can help you integrate your new reality, and it allows others to support you. This is taking care of yourself. It's okay to talk about what you want or need. Maybe take a vacation, get a massage, or spend the day reading in bed. If someone asks if there's anything they can do for you, say "Yes!" Enlist those friends as your personal shopper or allow them to take younger family members to the movies so you can have some downtime.

The holidays tend to bring up a lot of emotions, so give yourself grace to feel whatever you're feeling. Treat yourself like you would a best friend and set aside any expectations of what the holidays "need" to be. For some, the holidays may be a good time to reestablish routines or connect with loved ones. Don't feel guilty if you experience some joy during this season, even when you are grieving. It's possible for grief and joy to mingle, to sit side by side at your holiday table, giggling and crying together.

Finally, reach out for support if you need someone to talk to or desire some resources to help you through the holidays. I would love to see you at our annual Let's Remember in November memorial celebration. This is a safe space to share stories about your loved one, make a memorial ornament, and make new friends. Whatever you choose to do this holiday season, I wish you peace and comfort as you continue your journey.

In peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cindy Holda".

Cindy Holda M.Div.
Bereavement Coordinator

2025 Bereavement Support Groups/Events

These groups are open to anyone who has experienced the death of someone close to them. Our groups and workshops focus on learning, healing, and encouragement. All are welcome.

Bridge of Hope Bereavement Care Group - Rockford

Oct. 13, 20, 27 and Nov. 3, 10, 17
10-11:30 AM

Northern Illinois Hospice
4751 Harrison Ave., Rockford

Bridge of Hope Bereavement Care Group - Sycamore

Nov. 3, 10, 17, 24 and Dec. 1, 8
5:30-7:00 PM

Northern Illinois Hospice/
Gateway Arts Building
2225 Gateway Dr., Sycamore

Let's Remember in November

November 7

4:30-6:00 PM

Northern Illinois Hospice
4751 Harrison Ave., Rockford

Memorial Pillow Workshop

January 31

Two Sessions: 9:30 AM

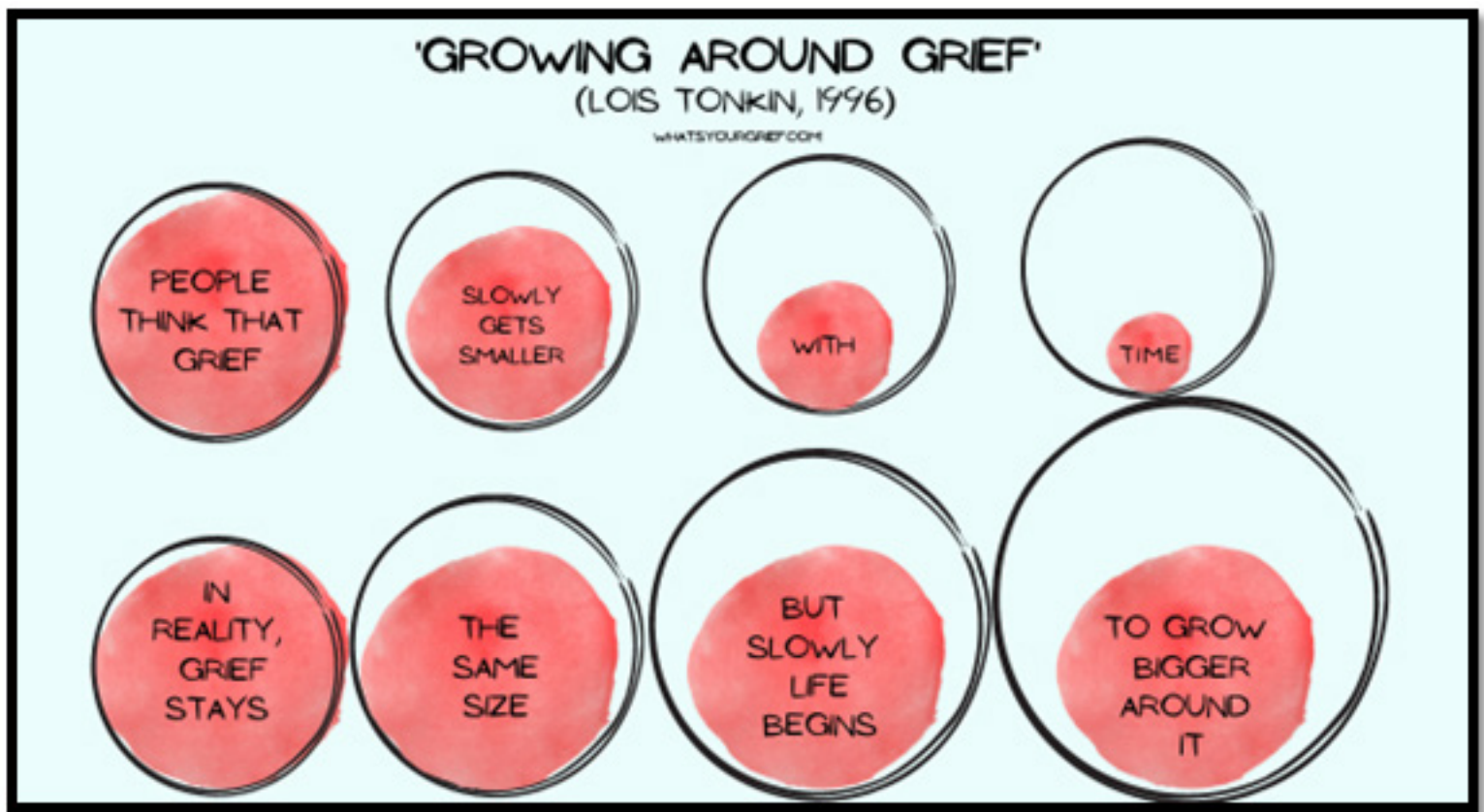
or 10:30 AM

DeKalb Public Library
309 Oak Street, DeKalb

This free workshop will provide the opportunity to create a pillow from a loved-one's button-down shirt or t-shirt. Sewers will be available to assist you, all you need to bring is the shirt you would like for your pillow. Individuals or family groups can create up to two pillows during the one-hour workshop. Please do not bring jackets, denim, or thick fabrics. Registration is required.

Bereavement support and information will be available. Missing our loved ones is difficult, come create a huggable, loveable memorial to cherish.

*To register, find the group/
event date on the calendar at
northernillinoishospice.org/events.*



The Shifting Nature of Grieving continued from page 1

Some find this model a helpful way to find hope in the future, without any pressure to “move on” or diminish our grief. The new

experiences we have can be integrated alongside our loss. Some days your ‘space’ for new experiences may feel more limited than

other days. This is normal and understandable, but in time, the proportion of your energy that grief takes up often shifts. Be

kind to yourself, utilize the supports you have, and don’t forget we’re available to accompany you on your grief journey as well.

Accentuate the Positive

By: Matthew Sockolov

The mind naturally clings to unpleasant experiences in order to “brace” you and protect you from danger. By actively seeking out moments of joy, you encourage the brain to shift that bias. As the saying goes, what you put your attention on grows - if you look for pleasant experiences, you will find them. This exercise allows you to work to bring intentional mindfulness to the positive

moments of your day.

1. Start your day with the intention of finding good things; be a hunter on the lookout for something that brings you happiness.

2. When you notice anything that makes you happy - whether it’s making it through a green light or calling an old friend - fully take in the moment. First, notice your mental state. Try to identify what the experience is in the mind:

calmness, relaxation, contentment, satisfaction, and so on.

3. Next, bring your awareness to the body. Focus on the chest, abdomen, and shoulders. Notice any feelings of ease in the body, openness, or relief from tension. As you breathe, make space to feel the happiness all over.

4. Without clinging to the feeling, try to stay in tune with the experience. Let the feelings fade naturally and

notice when they have left.

5. Remain open during your day to other joys you may experience. Remember, they do not have to be grand moments of elation. You can use the subtle moments of contentment and ease.

Article from Practicing Mindfulness: 75 Essential Meditations to Reduce Stress, Improve Mental Health, and Find Peace in the Everyday published by Callisto Publishing 2018



NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
ROCKFORD, IL
PERMIT NO. 524

First in *caring* for life's final months

northernillinoishospice.org
4751 Harrison Ave., Rockford, IL 61108

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Journey

Fall 2025

A grief community publication
from Northern Illinois Hospice

follow us  

"There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition, and of unspeakable love."

- WASHINGTON IRVING -

If you would like to be removed from our mailing lists, please call 815.398.0500 or email cholda@niha.org.