

# Louisville group to provide outlet for men's grief

Darla Carter, Louisville 7:20 a.m. EDT August 8, 2014



(Photo: Cameron Whitman, Getty Images/iStockphoto)

Men who want help coping with the death of a friend or a loved one have a new place to turn to in Louisville that's exclusively for them.

Grieving Men is a support group being offered at the [Hosparus \(http://www.hosparus.org/\)](http://www.hosparus.org/) Grief Counseling Center, near Bowman Field, in Louisville. The group, which needs new participants, is open to any man who's lost someone, whether it be a spouse, child or brother.

Grief counselor Jeff Meyer started the all-male group last month to help men deal with loss through sharing.

"Men adjust quicker to the idea of community when it's with other men because, unfortunately in our culture, there's a lot of stereotypes that persist about what's OK for men and women to do," he said.

Men who believe that males are raised to be tough sometimes think of grieving or expressing emotion as "being weak or less than," said [Dr. Eli Karam](http://louisville.edu/kent/ABOUT%20KENT/Faculty%20and%20Staff/faculty/faculty-bio-and-information/karambio)

[\(http://louisville.edu/kent/ABOUT%20KENT/Faculty%20and%20Staff/faculty/faculty-bio-and-information/karambio\)](http://louisville.edu/kent/ABOUT%20KENT/Faculty%20and%20Staff/faculty/faculty-bio-and-information/karambio), an associate professor in the University of Louisville's Kent School of Social Work.

But the group is designed to show men that "it's OK to have some vulnerability," Meyer said. "When we create a space where everybody's on the same level, a lot of guards come down, and so it's not like, 'Am I going to be judged for this?' 'Am I going to lose respect (because) I'm expressing emotion?'"

Many men pride themselves on being independent, but "all of our good grief research shows us that being around people with shared loss is really beneficial because ... it normalizes the experience," Meyer said. "There's a lot of power, a lot of strength, being in a room where everybody in there has this thing in common."



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Darla Carter, The Courier-Journal

It's normal to want to push pain away, but with grief, "we want to embrace that pain because it will push us forward in our grief process," Meyer said.

Hosparus Southern Indiana has a similar group for men, but it's limited to grieving husbands. It started in January and is also seeking new members.

Along with giving men time to talk, Meyer plans to teach basic grief education on what grief is and how it can affect people — physically, cognitively and emotionally.

"Grief is a process that contains a lot of emotions," such as sadness, anger and guilt, Meyer said. "Those seem to be the same regardless of gender."

Men, however, often have an easier time getting in touch with the anger part of their grief, he said, and they may struggle with questions related to that. For example, should I be angry at God, the disease that took my loved one, the medical community, myself, or even the person who died?

Anger and frustration may mask the loneliness, sadness and vulnerability that men are feeling inside, said Karam, who's not part of the Hosparus group.

It's important "to find safe people to talk to — friends, a family member, someone — where they can share those more vulnerable emotions," he said.

Along with being that outlet, the group can answer questions such as "Is what I'm feeling normal?" and "Should my feelings of sadness be gone by now?" Meyer said.

He noted that there's no deadline on grief.

"We never say over," Meyer said. "You get over a paper cut; you don't get over somebody dying."

Karam said the second year after losing a spouse can actually be harder than the first because reality sets in that the person is not coming back. Finding ways to move forward, such as adopting new hobbies and creating new connections, can be helpful, he said.

"Develop that support group of existing people and (be) open to meeting new people," Karam said.

Men often like to channel their grief into an action, such as creating a memorial to the deceased or joining a victims' rights group, Meyer said. "He's able to express his grief in the confines of that action."

In the group, "people can share ideas, especially some of these activity type ideas that men often come up with," he said. "Those are very easy and practical to reproduce or try to build on."

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## **JOINING THE GROUP**

The men's support group meets 6-7:30 p.m. on the first and third Thursdays of the month at the Hosparus Grief Counseling Center, 3526 Ephraim McDowell Drive. Participation is free and open to men coping with the death of anyone. Register by calling (502) 456-5451 or (888) 345-8197.

There is another men's grief group that meets from 2 to 3:30 p.m. on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month at Hosparus Southern Indiana, 502 Hausfeldt Lane in New Albany. It is limited to men who've lost a spouse. Register by calling (502) 456-5451 or (888) 345-8197.

## **MEN'S HEALTH EVENT**

Norton Healthcare's "Men's Health: A Family Affair" event will be 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sept. 13 at the Kentucky Center for African American Heritage, 1701 W. Muhammad Ali Blvd. It will feature health screenings for men and women; discussions about disease prevention, wellness and reaching health goals; and family activities. There also will be career advice and information on financial and spiritual health. For more information or to register, call 629-1234, or go to [NortonHealthcare.com/MensHealth](http://www.nortonhealthcare.com/MensHealth) (<http://www.nortonhealthcare.com/MensHealth>).

## **TIPS: COPING WITH GRIEF**

- Take good care of yourself by, for example, getting enough sleep and eating well.
- Understand that grief is a process and may take longer than expected to resolve. Have realistic expectations of the process and yourself.
- Recognize who your support system is and don't be afraid to ask for and accept help.
- Don't fall for the stereotype that it's weak to cry or express vulnerability or sadness.
- Realize that embracing the pain of loss can be helpful.
- Be open to finding new friends and activities. Don't let loyalty to the deceased person stop you from moving forward with your life.
- Find a way to honor your loved one, such as creating a memorial.

A closer look at the program

Watch a video of grief counselor Jeff Meyer discussing the Louisville support group for grieving men. [courier-journal.com/health \(/health\)](http://courier-journal.com/health (/health))

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