

Grief and Loss – Suggestions and Tips

Tips for Helping Yourself through Grief

- Go gently. Don't rush too much. Your body needs energy for repair.
- Don't take on new responsibilities right away. Don't over-extend yourself. Keep decision-making to a minimum.
- Accept help and support when offered.
- Ask for help. No one can read our minds. It is very important to find someone who cares, understands, and with whom you may talk freely. It's okay to need comforting.
- Seek the support of others. Invite a relative/friend for dinner or overnight. Also, consider meeting new people.
- Subdue pain. It cannot be outrun. Let the grief/healing process run its full course.
- It's okay to feel depressed at times. Crying can make some of us feel better.
- If Sundays, holidays, etc., are especially difficult times, schedule activities that you find particularly comforting at these times.
- Seek the help of a counselor, clergy member, or spiritual leader if grief is unresolved.
- Try to get adequate rest. Go to bed earlier. Avoid caffeine.
- Good nutrition is important. Limit sweet, salty and fatty foods. Eat a balanced meal with plenty of water.
- Keep a journal. It is a good way to understand what you are feeling/thinking, and when reread later, you will notice progress.
- Read. There are many helpful books on grief. If grief is understood, it is a little easier to handle.

- Exercise. It offers an opportunity to work off frustration, aids sleep.
- Try to socialize with family and friends. Don't feel guilty if you have a good time. Your relatives would want you to be happy.
- It's okay to be angry. You may be angry at yourself, God, your spouse, others, or just angry in general. Don't push anger away. Let it out. (Hit a pillow, scream, exercise, hit a punching bag, etc.)
- Do not have unrealistic expectations of yourself. Grief takes TIME. It comes and goes.
- Do things a little differently, yet try not to make a lot of changes. This sounds like a contradiction, but its not.
- Plan new interests. Join a class (exercise, self-awareness, craft, adult education) or read. Learn something new. Rediscover old interests, activities, and friends.
- Plan things to which you can look forward to – a trip, a visit, lunch with a friend. Start now to build memories for tomorrow.
- Find quotes, posters, poems, etc. that are helpful to you and post them where you can see them.
- Pray and talk with your spouse, family or friends.
- Other ideas: take a hot relaxing bath; bask in the sun; take time for yourself (movie, theater or dinner). Be good to yourself.
- Do something for someone else. Join a volunteer or support group. Helping others does much to ease the pain. Reach out and touch someone.
- Be determined to work through your grief.
- Remember, you will be better. Hold on to HOPE. Some days you just seem to exist, but better days will be back.
- Simply stated – put balance back in your life: Pray, Rest, Work and Play.

12 Steps in the Grief Process

- **Recovery From a Loved One's Death Requires More Than Time**

Yet, if we allow ourselves the time to mourn we can gradually break grief's grip on us. Recognizing the role and value of the grieving process orients us to accepting the fact of the death. Acceptance marks a major step towards recovery.

- **Grief is Universal, but the Griever is Unique and Distinctive**

Grieving follows a pattern, but each griever experiences it differently. Awareness of the basic pattern reveals common ground for mutual help and support. Recognition of uniqueness enables grievers to help themselves, guides sympathizers in what to say and do.

- **Shock Initiates Us Into Mourning**

We go numb when someone we love dies. We feel stunned, in a trance. This is nature's way of cushioning us against tragedy. The length and depth of this state varies according to our relationship, the cause of death, whether it was sudden or expected. Shock allows us time to absorb what has happened so we can begin to adjust. The guidance of caring people can sustain new grievers. As numbness wears off and acceptance grows, we regain control of the direction of our lives.

- **Grief Causes Depression**

Grievers typically, but in varying degrees, experience loneliness and depression. This pain, too, will pass. Being alone does not always mean or result in loneliness. Reaching out to others is a key way to overpower loneliness and to overcome depression.

- **Grief is Hazardous to Our Health**

The mental and emotional upset of a loss by death causes physical distress and vulnerability to various illnesses. Grievers sometimes neglect healthy nourishment and exercise, and overindulge in drinking alcohol, smoking or medication. We might need a doctor's advice in regard to our symptoms, their causes and their treatment.

- **Grievers Need to Know They're Normal**

The death of a loved one makes the future uncertain. We might panic in the face of the unknown and fear life without the one who has died. Panic prevents concentration and defers acceptance of the finality of death. It tempts us to run from life, to avoid people and to try new things. We might even think we're going crazy. Patience with ourselves and a willingness to accept help enables us to subdue panic and outgrow its confusion.

- **Grievers Suffer Feelings**

Many blame themselves after a loved one's death, for the death itself or for faults in the relationship. We have all made mistakes and sincere regret is the best response to them. However, self-reproach out of proportion to our behavior affects our mental health and impedes our recovery. Close friends or a trusted counselor can aid us in confronting and dealing with guilt feelings, whether justified or exaggerated.

- **Grief Makes People Angry**

People in grief naturally ask, "Why? Why him? Why me? Why now? Why like this?" Most of these questions have no answers. Frustration then causes us to feel resentment and anger. We want someone to blame: God, doctors, clergy, ourselves, even the one who has died. If we can accept the lack of answers to "Why?" we might begin to say, instead, what we can do now to grow through what has happened. Then we have started to move on beyond anger and towards hope.

- **Emotional Upheaval Characterizes Grievers**

A loved one's death disrupts emotional balance. The variety and intensity of feelings seem overwhelming. Other grievers and counselors can help us interpret and deal with these feelings. As we come to understand what we experience, we can find appropriate ways to ventilate our emotions and to channel them constructively.

- **Grievers Often Lack Direction and Purpose**

At times in the grieving process, a kind of drifting occurs. Mourners find familiar and necessary activities difficult. We prefer to daydream about what was or fantasize about what might have been. If we can foster gratitude for the past and begin to assess our potential for the future, this will prove to be a passing phase and not a permanent state.

- **Healing Brings Hope to Grievers**

It takes time and effort, but gradually hope dawns for bereaved people. We learn to express emotions without embarrassment or apology. We cherish memories, no matter how bittersweet some are. We begin to feel concern for and show interest in others. We make decisions and assume responsibility for ourselves. The example of other recovered grievers helps us discover and develop our own potential.

- **Survivors Reaffirm Themselves and Choose Life**

Eventually, grievers recognize and embrace a healing truth: *Grief has changed me, but has not destroyed me.* I've discovered new and stronger things about myself. I can build on strengths developed through adversity. I'm no longer my old self, but I'm still me and I face the future with confidence. Life is worth living because I can still love and be loved.

Grief vs. Depression

Distinguishing between grief and clinical depression isn't always easy, since they share many symptoms. However, there are ways to tell the difference. Remember, grief can be a roller coaster. It involves a wide variety of emotions and a mix of good and bad days. Even when you're in the middle of the grieving process, you will have moments of pleasure or happiness. With depression, on the other hand, the feelings of emptiness and despair are constant.

Other symptoms that suggest depression, not just grief:

- Intense, pervasive sense of guilt
- Thoughts of suicide or a preoccupation with dying
- Feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Slow speech and body movements
- Inability to function at work, home, and/or school
- Seeing or hearing things that are not there

Knowing when to seek professional assistance

When left untreated, complicated grief and depression can lead to significant emotional damage, life-threatening health problems, and even suicide. But treatment can help you get better.

Contact a grief counselor or professional therapist if you:

- Feel like life isn't worth living
- Wish you had died with your loved one
- Blame yourself for the loss or for failing to prevent it
- Feel numb and disconnected from others for more than a few weeks
- Are having difficulty trusting others since your loss
- Are unable to perform your normal daily activities

For additional information and support, contact the Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline at 800.272.3900.

Source:

Smith, M. and Segal, J. (2012). Helpguide.org. Retrieved from:
http://www.helpguide.org/mental/grief_loss.htm