

Helping Yourself Through Grief

Grief is experienced whenever you lose something important to you. Grief is so powerful that people sometimes look for ways to go around it rather than experience it. This approach will not work. The best thing you can do for yourself is to work through grief and express your feelings. The following are specific ways to help yourself work through grief.

Basic Health Concerns

Grief is exhausting and it is important to continue your daily health routines.

- Try to eat regular, nourishing meals. If it is too difficult to eat three regular meals, try 4 or 5 small ones. Have nourishing food available to nibble on rather than chips and candy.
- Rest is important. Try to develop regular bedtime routines. If you are having a hard time getting to sleep, try a glass of warm milk or some soft easy listening music to soothe your thoughts.
- Continue your exercise program and develop a manageable routine.
- Meditation, perhaps in the form of prayer or yoga, can help you get the rest you need.
- Make sure your family doctor knows what has happened so he or she can help monitor your health.

Outside Support

Grief does not have to be as isolating as it seems.

- Look for a support group, lecture or seminar that pertains to your situation.
- Continue attending church services and stay in contact with this "family", if that has been a source of support to you.
- Let your friends and other family members know what your emotional or physical needs are. The more they know what to do to help you, the more available they will be.

Feelings

- Read books or articles of the process of grief so you can identify what you are feeling and have some ideas on how to help yourself.
- Allow your feelings to be expressed appropriately.
- Crying is good. You feel lighter after you have had a good cry. Consider sharing your tears with other loved ones. We laugh together, why not cry together as well.
- Find friends or family members to share your feelings with.
- Be careful not to use alcohol, drugs, or tranquilizers. These will only mask the pain and could lead to problems.
- Keeping a journal is a good way to identify feelings and also to see progress.
- Holidays and anniversaries need special planning. They are impossible to ignore. Look for a workshop on dealing with the holidays and make plans with your family and friends.

Be Kind To Yourself

- If you desire some alone time, take it as often as you need to.
- Give yourself rewards along the way as something to look forward to.
- Look for small ways to pamper yourself, such as bubble baths, a new cologne, soft pajamas, or a new haircut.
- A short trip can be a good break from grief, but be aware that upon your return, the pain of grief will be waiting for you. However, you will have had a rest and the knowledge that you can enjoy some things in life again.
- Look for some new interests, perhaps a new hobby or resume an old one.
- Carry a special letter, poem, or quote with you to read when the going gets tough.
- Try to enjoy the good days and don't feel guilty for doing so.
- Reach out to help someone else.
- Learn to have patience with yourself. Remember, grief takes time.
- Know that you WILL get better and there WILL be a time when you can look forward to getting up in the morning and be glad you are alive.

Help for Your Marriage and Relationships

- Good communication is necessary. People cannot read your mind. They may not know that this particular day is difficult or they may not know how to help you.
 - Talk about what is helpful to you and what is not helpful to you.
 - Be sensitive to the needs of your partner. Grief is different for each person.
 - By reviewing past losses together, you can understand how your partner may react to the recent one.
 - Avoid competition in who is hurting most. Each person will have difficult issues to cope with. Grief is hard for everybody.
 - Consult each other regarding birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries. It is a mistake to hope the holiday will slip by unnoticed. Make plans and discuss them.
 - Try not to expect too much from your partner. People do not operate at 100 percent during the grieving period. The dishes may not get done or the yard may not be mowed as regularly as before. Many chores can wait. Hire someone to help you catch up.
 - Read and educate yourself about the grief process. Go to the library and get an armload of books. Read ones in which you feel the author "is speaking to you" and return the others. Grief books do not need to be read cover to cover. Look for a book with a detailed table of contents that will enable you to select certain parts as you need them.
 - Consider the "gender" differences. Men and women grieve differently. Usually, women are more comfortable expressing their emotions. Men often get busy, burying themselves at work or taking on projects at home.
 - Avoid pressuring your partner about decisions that can wait. Of course, some decisions cannot be postponed, and those you will have to deal with. However, many can be put off for a day or a week or even longer.
 - Take a short trip to "re-group." If a child has died, it is very important to reacquaint yourself with the new family structure. Getting away from the telephone and memories for a few days can help you do this.
 - Seek professional guidance, especially if you feel your loss is interfering with your marriage or relationships.
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