

What Do We Need During Grief?

Time: Time alone and time with others whom you trust and who will listen when you need to talk. Months and years of time to feel and understand the feelings that go along with loss.

Rest—Relaxation—Exercise—Nourishment—Diversion: You may need extra amounts of things you needed before. Hot baths, afternoon naps, a trip, a “cause” to work for to help others—any of these may give you a lift. Grief is an exhausting process, emotionally. You need to replenish yourself. Follow what feels healing to you and what connects you to the people and things you love.

Security: Try to reduce or find help for financial or other stresses in your life. Allow yourself to be close to those you trust. Getting back into routine helps. You may need to allow yourself to do things at your own pace.

Hope: You may find hope and comfort from those who have experienced a similar loss. Knowing some things that helped them, and realizing that they have “recovered” and that time does help, may give you hope that sometime in the future your grief will be less raw and painful.

Caring: For a while, it will seem that much of life is without “meaning”. At times like these, small goals are helpful.

Something to Look Forward to: Like playing tennis with a friend next week, a movie tomorrow night, a trip next month, helps you get through the time in the immediate future. Living one day at a time is a rule of thumb. At first, don’t be surprised if your enjoyment of these things isn’t the same. This is normal. As time passes, you may need to work on some longer range goals to give some structure and direction to your life. You may need guidance or counseling to help with this.

Small Pleasures: Do not underestimate the healing effects of small pleasures, as you are ready. Sunsets, a walk in the woods, a favorite food—all are small steps in regaining pleasure in life itself.

Permission to Backslide: Sometimes after a period of feeling good, we find ourselves back in the old feelings of extreme sadness, despair, or anger. This is often the nature of grief, up and down, and it may happen over and over for quite a time. It happens because as humans, we cannot take in all of the pain and the meaning of death, all at once. So we let it in a little at a time.

Drugs Are Not Helpful: Even medication used to help people get through periods of shock, under a physician’s guidance, may prolong and delay the necessary process of grieving. We cannot prevent or cure grief. *The only way out is through.*

Taking Care of Yourself

In caring for ourselves, we need to identify those activities that are healing to us as well as those areas that may hinder our healing and cope with each appropriately.

- Give yourself permission, time, and space to grieve.
- Don’t pretend that death doesn’t hurt.
- Feel free to protest the “why” of the death.
- Don’t judge your level of grief and healing by how others are grieving and healing, but by your own internal awareness.
- Understand and accept your limitations.
- Respect your spouse or partner’s timetable and method of grieving.
- Don’t escape into loneliness.
- Get rid of imagined guilt and “if onlys”.
- Laughter doesn’t mean you are being disrespectful to your child’s memory.
- Confront the fears of your death and the death of other loved ones.
- Cry.
- Honestly express your feelings about this death to people who will understand and not be judgmental and who will not be hurt by your honest expressions of feelings.

- Recognize that seeking professional counseling doesn't mean that you are weak, inadequate, or crazy.
- Use religion, philosophy, poetry, music, art, gardening, tennis, walks at nature centers, reading, volunteer work, to gain relief and understanding.
- Talk about your experience to friends who were involved, and to friends who were not involved with the death.
- Accept your friends with all their imperfections and occasional bad advice, for you too have your moments of imperfection.
- Tell others what you want from them: help, emotional support, time sharing.
- Continue to participate in activities that are fun for you and with people who are special to you; don't underestimate the effects of small pleasures.