

What You Need During Grief

Grieving the death of someone does not have a particular timetable. Mourning your loss may take weeks, months, or even years. From many individuals, the death of their loved one is carried with them throughout their lives. Although there is no "cure" for grief, here are several ways to help you cope with your loss, and begin to ease the pain.

- **TIME**

Take time alone and time with others whom you trust and who will listen when you need to talk.

- **CARING**

Try to allow yourself to accept the expressions of caring from others even though they may be awkward. Helping a friend or relative suffering the same loss may bring a feeling of closeness with that person.

- **REST, RELAXATION, EXERCISE, DIVERSION**

You may need to give yourself extra amounts of things that nourish and replenish you. Hot baths, afternoon naps, a short trip, a project helping others -- any of these may give you a lift. Grief can be an emotionally and physically exhausting process.

- **GOALS**

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 lunch with a friend that day, a movie the next week, a trip next month -- helps you get through the time in the immediate future. Sometimes living moment by moment, or one day at a time, is the rule of thumb. As time passes, you may want to work on longer range goals to give yourself some structure and direction to your life.

- **SECURITY**

Try to reduce or find help for financial and other stresses in your life. Allow yourself to be close and open up to those you trust. Developing or getting back into a routine helps. Focus on doing things at your own pace.

- **PERMISSION TO BACKSLIDE**

Sometimes after a period of feeling better, you find yourself back in the old feelings of extreme sadness, despair, or anger. This is the nature of grief -- one moment you're up, and next, you're down. Sometimes when you backslide, you are simply remembering, re-experiencing the trauma or enormity of your loss which starts to flood back and overwhelm you.

- **HOPE**

You may find hope and comfort from those who have experienced a similar loss. Knowing what helped them, and realizing that over time they have recovered, may give you the hope and strength to envision that you, too, will eventually heal from your grief.

- **SMALL PLEASURES**

Do not underestimate the healing power of small pleasures. Sunsets, massage, a walk near the

What You Need During Grief

ocean, a favorite food -- all are small steps toward giving to yourself and regaining your pleasure in life itself.

- **BE AWARE OF DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE**

The use of drugs, alcohol, and even prescription medications may prolong and delay the necessary process of grieving. You cannot prevent or cure grief. The only way out is through the grief process.

- **PERMISSION TO CHANGE YOUR MIND**

Grieving can shake you up inside. You may have difficulty concentrating; or find yourself constantly reevaluating your priorities. You may be unsure or uncertain what you want in numerous aspects of your life. When you make commitments or plans, be sure to let people know you may need room to cancel or change your mind.

- **BE PREPARED AROUND HOLIDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES**

For many people, holidays, birthdays, or the anniversary of their loved one's death can bring up painful memories or revive feelings of longing and sadness over their loss -- even for those who believe they have "finished" their grieving and moved on. This "anniversary" reaction is a common part of the grieving process, but you may be still be surprised by the flood of emotions that may be reactivated during this period. You might want to be especially aware and gentle with yourself around this time. You may also want to allow more private time for yourself, or arrange to spend more time around family and others close to you.

In many instances, people can move through their grief on their own, or with their existing supports and resources. However, sometimes you need outside help or assistance to keep yourself from "going under," or getting "perpetually stuck" in your grief. These conditions can happen especially if you are experiencing multiple stressors, or coping with cumulative grief. These warning signs include continuing bouts of depression, social withdrawal and isolation, suicidal thoughts, or continuing feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and despair.