

# Self-Care During Grief

After a significant loss, grief is a natural response with a spectrum of emotions. It is a time we need the help of relatives and friends, and may need the help of professional counseling. It is also important for us to take steps in caring for ourselves. Remember that grief takes a lot of energy. Treat yourself with the same care and affection you would offer to a good friend in the same situation. Not all suggestions will be helpful to everyone; your grief is unique to you. Choose the ideas that resonate with you and your experience.

## Be patient with yourself.

- Take time for yourself. Your body, mind, and heart need energy to mend.
- Carefully consider taking on new responsibilities right away. Avoid overextending yourself and making major decisions during this time.
- Appreciate your own strength and avoid comparing yourself to others and their grief.
- Throw away notions of a fixed period of mourning; one year and then you're "over it." This is a myth; grief takes time, whatever time it takes.

## Ask for and accept help.

- Don't be afraid to ask for help from those close to you. So much hurt and pain go ignored during grief because we don't want to bother others. Ask yourself: Wouldn't you want someone close to you to ask for help if they needed it?
- It is very important to find someone who cares and understands, with whom you may talk freely. Seek out that true friend, another bereaved person, or a support group member.
- Accept help and support when offered. It's okay to need comforting. Often people wait to be told when you're ready to talk or if you need anything. Tell them.
- If you are having thoughts about hurting yourself or ending your life, call Crisis Services at (716) 834-3131.
- Join a support group. They offer understanding, guidance, friendship, and hope.
- Give yourself some time to sort out your thoughts, but don't build a wall around yourself in fear of being hurt again. It is important to love and enjoy the people in your life instead of distancing yourself from them, and thus, them from you.
- If grief is intense and prolonged, it may challenge your physical and mental well-being. A counselor may be able to help you through these difficult periods.  
*Call the Wilson Support Center to inquire about counseling options.*

### **Accept your feelings.**

- Feel what you feel. You don't choose your emotions, they choose you.
- It's okay to cry. Crying can help to release various emotions you've held in while out in public, around family members, and at work. Let it out; you will feel better and stronger.
- It's okay to be angry. You may be angry with yourself, God, the person who died, others, or just plain angry. Don't push it down. Let it out; hit a pillow, scream, chop wood, exercise, etc.
- Many people think they are going crazy; this is a normal reaction. You are not losing your mind; you're reacting to death.
- Depression is common to those grieving. Be careful not to totally withdraw yourself from others. If your depression becomes severe or you're considering suicide, get professional help immediately.
- Emotions can be raw. It is important to let these feelings out. If you don't, they are sure to come out some other time, some other way. You won't suffer nearly as much from getting too upset as you will from denying your emotions by keeping them held inside.
- You may have physical problems appear or worsen as a result of your grief. These physical problems are real; make sure to keep up with your medical visits and take steps to care for your health.

### **Lean into the pain.**

- You can't outrun pain. You can't go around it, over it, or under it; you must go through it in order to survive it. Be careful not to get stuck, asking for help when you need it.
- Save time to grieve. Don't throw yourself into your work or other activities that leave you no time for grieving.
- In a time of severe grief, try to limit your use of alcohol. It is a depressant and generally leaves you feeling worse. Similarly, some medications (prescriptions and over the counter) may contribute to the depressive symptoms of grief. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about all medications during this time. There are medications available that can ease the more acute symptoms of grief. These should only be considered when grief responses are prolonged or severe.
- Seek the help of a counselor or clergy if grief is unresolved.

### **Be good to yourself.**

- Keep a journal. It is a good way to understand what you are feeling and thinking. Hopefully, when you reread it later on you will see that you are getting better.
- Try to get adequate rest. Go to bed earlier and avoid caffeine.
- Good nutrition is important; the things we put into our bodies effect our brains and its ability to cope.

- If there are particular days of the week/month/year that are especially difficult, schedule activities that you find particularly comforting into those time periods.
- Read recommended books on grief. Learning about others' experiences of grief can help you to understand what you are going through and how you may be able to cope better.
- Moderate exercise helps to work off frustration and can help sleep quality improve.
- Begin to build pleasant memories with family and friends. Don't feel guilty about enjoying yourself. It is possible to feel sad and happy and angry all at the same time.
- Adjust your routine to focus on the things you need. Avoid making huge changes, but look for ways to individualize your daily life.
- Plan things to which you can look forward – a trip, visiting a loved one, lunch with a friend, an upcoming event. Start today to build memories for tomorrow.
- Find quotes or posters that are helpful to you and hang them where you can see them regularly.
- Treat yourself to small indulgences: hot baths, take out, movies, a good book, etc.
- Work toward balance in your life: rest, work, read, relax.
- Maintain or develop a spiritual focus in your life, if that has been helpful to you in the past or something new that could bring about positive change.
- When you feel ready, aim at regaining a healthy, balanced life by broadening your interests. Take time for activities that can bring some purpose into your life. Think about doing something you've always wanted to do: taking a class, community projects, hobby clubs. Or rediscover old interests and activities you may had to sacrifice previously.
- Remember: take your life one moment, one hour, one day at a time.

### **Grief takes time.**

- Grief can come and go over time. Be gentle with the expectations you have for yourself.
- You will get better. Hold onto hope. Some days you may feel like you're just existing, but, gradually, better days will return with a renewed sense of purpose.

*If you have questions or concerns about the grieving process,  
please give us a call at (716) 836-6460 or email [griefsupport@palliativecare.org](mailto:griefsupport@palliativecare.org)  
for more information, resource and support.*