



WHAT DO I DO NOW?

Losing a loved one is one of the most difficult life experiences. Whether you have had the experience of losing someone you love before, or this is your first significant loss, it can be a lonely, frightening and unhappy time. Below you will find some basic facts about grief and a few practical suggestions on how to get through it. There is nothing we can say or do to change the fact that you've lost someone. We can offer ideas and information that can be useful in coping with the experience. Although what you are experiencing is not normal for you, chances are very good that it is normal for the grieving process.

THERE ARE NO RULES

One thing that is difficult for many bereaved people is that there simply are no hard and fast absolutes. Historically, society had clear expectations about periods of mourning, social etiquette and expectations of the bereaved. This is no longer true today. The good thing about this is that it makes allowances for the individual. The grief experience can be very disorienting and confusing and many people wonder "what am I supposed to do"? The only real answer to this question is: What seems best for you? Perhaps you are a person who needs to stay busy. Another person may need to take some time off work or go away for a few days at the first opportunity. As long as you are not hurting yourself or others, whatever gives you comfort for now is perfectly acceptable.

FEELINGS (OR LACK OF THEM)

It is common for people to report a sense of "numb" or "blank" in the initial stages of grief. This is a very normal response to loss, and some researchers even argue that it is beneficial. This numbness can allow us to adjust gradually to the fact that the person we love is no longer immediately available. This numbness usually begins to recede gradually or intermittently, and feelings of sadness, anger, fear, anxiety or even relief may begin to surface.

COPING WITH "GRIEFBURSTS"

Extreme emotions can well up at inconvenient moments, or in situations where the feeling seems "out of place" with the surroundings. Dr. Alan Wolfelt, a grief therapist, calls these moments "griefbursts". The unavoidable reality is that this is part of the process, and all you can really do is ride the waves of emotion as they come to the best of your ability. If you can, remove yourself from the situation, perhaps to a nearby restroom or your car. If you are unable to leave, stop what you're doing for a moment. Sit down or stand in a quiet corner if possible. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. It may be useful to rehearse this in your mind in moments when you are not overwhelmed. These suggestions seem obvious, but during a griefburst, panic or anxiety can make it difficult to think clearly. If you have walked through a griefburst in your mind ahead of time it can help get you through the moment.

GRIEF IS A PROCESS, NOT AN EVENT

The healthcare community has come to recognize that many experiences are common in a grief experience. However, no one can tell you exactly what to expect or when you will be "over it". Grief recovery is different for everyone,



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WHAT DO I DO NOW? (CONTINUED)

GRIEF IS A PROCESS (CONTINUED)

happens in different ways and in different times for different people. The process of moving past loss means different things to different people. You may need to revise your ideas about what you can and cannot do for awhile. This is not failure, but a recognition that people and situations change, and it's ok to adjust your expectations of yourself and others. For the time being, try to make your well being your primary concern. Even if you have others to care for, you cannot fill the needs of others if your own emotional "cup" is empty.

GRIEF AFFECTS YOUR BODY

Grief can manifest physically. All over body aches, headaches, disrupted sleep, difficulty breathing, tightness in the stomach and other physical symptoms are very common reactions to loss. Try to have an awareness of this and allow for it. Perhaps you need a nap in the middle of your Saturday afternoon, or go to bed the minute you get home from work. If you can't sleep, try to keep a book, journal, or some other activity that you can do in bed available. If your body hurts, schedule a massage or just make it a practice to soak with Epsom salts in the tub. Try to maintain a nutritional balance, but don't be too hard on yourself and recognize that occasional comfort foods can be ok too.

GRIEF AFFECTS YOUR MIND

Many people who are grieving find that they have difficulty concentrating, remembering details or even having blank periods of memory. Many people report

feeling a sense of "fuzziness", disorientation or a sense of being "outside myself". This is normal in grief, even if it is not normal for you. This mental fog can be very frustrating and disturbing, but please know that it is temporary. Have some patience if you find yourself being forgetful or absent minded. If it really bothers you, keep a pen and notebook handy to write everything down.

GRIEF CAN AFFECT YOUR SPIRITUALITY

The experience of a loss can severely undermine our assumptions about life and the world around us. Suddenly, "how the world works" can look different. It is not uncommon for people to experience doubts in their faith, to be angry at God, or to question long held values. This can lead one to feel isolated from the support of a spiritual community that usually would be a source of support. If you are experiencing this, talk to your clergy person, or to a chaplain. Chaplains are specifically trained to support you in spiritual crisis and most are trained to work on an interfaith basis. Signature Hospice has chaplains on staff, or you may also find a chaplain by calling your local hospital.

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