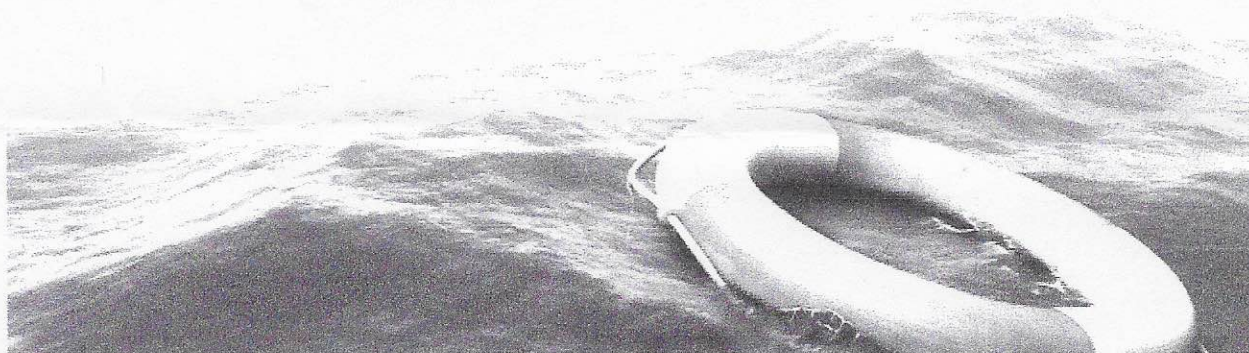


# After Grief: The Process of Healing



Benjamin Franklin wrote, "only two things in life are certain, death and taxes." Death is something that affects us all. No one is immune. Death is sometimes expected, sometimes unexpected. It happens to parents, grand-parents, friends, relatives, pets, and others. Death often takes away something that is very precious to us and leaves pain and grief in its wake. The pain that is associated with grief can be overwhelming. It is filled with a wide range of feelings, behaviors, thoughts and physical sensations. Grief often engulfs us. It comes in like a wave at the beach, and unfortunately, we never know when it is going to hit. When people are grieving, it is not unusual for them to believe that they are going crazy. They often don't understand the range of experiences that they are going through. They only know that they hurt.

During the early stages of grief, our body takes over and protects us from the severe pain that we might be experiencing. We are often confronted with the memories and visions of our loved one dying. When this occurs, we might have a myriad of the symptoms including anger, denial, self-blame or guilt, anxiety and depression. We might have also had unrealistic expectations to become "our old self" again.

Grief is a process; it is not an event. It takes time to heal; however, time alone does not heal all wounds. We need to give ourselves the opportunity to do the grief work necessary in order for the process of healing to begin.

How do we heal? What can we do to begin taking care of ourselves after a loved one has died? There are many things that we can do to help; the following is a list of some of them.

**Learn to be gentle with yourself.** Most of us know that we are our own worst critics. We expect more from ourselves than we would from anybody else. We often criticize ourselves, making statements like, "we are stupid" or "we should be over it already." Remember, work and time are what helps us heal. We need to allow that to occur.

**Cry.** Everyone has heard the expression "I just had a good cry." What does that mean? Why do they call it a good cry? Well, crying lets the pain out. Crying acts as both a pain reliever and a stress reducer. Let the tears come and help cleanse some of the pain associated with the loss.

**Talk to others.** Talking can be one of the most healing things we can do. There is a saying, "a joy shared is doubled, and a grief shared is halved." It is okay to halve some of our grief by sharing it with a counselor or a friend.

**Find a private place.** Each one of us can benefit from spending a little time sequestered away. Whether it be a room in the home, a place in the woods, a spot by the lake or any place that is loved; it is good. And remember, use it regularly.

**Don't make decisions.** In daily life it is often difficult to make major decisions. During grief, it is even more difficult. Don't make a major decision like selling a house or beginning a new job. Wait until some healing has occurred before making major changes in your life.

**Get enough rest and exercise.** Grief is a very exhausting time; it takes our energy and leaves us empty. When a car runs out of gas, it stops; when we don't get enough rest, our body stops. Exercise is also important. It is interesting to note that mental stress leads to illness and physical stress leads to relaxation.

**Eat healthy meals.** In our fast paced society, it is easy to forget about well-balanced, home-cooked meals. It is often easier and more convenient to stop by some fast food restaurant. Food is the energy that keeps the body going. Give it high test. We are worth it.

**Learn to laugh again.** We often feel disloyal to the loved one who has died by laughing and enjoying ourselves. Our loved one would want us to go on and find joy once again. When we rediscover our sense of humor, it helps bring us back to life.

**Ask for help.** Many of us have no problem "being there" when a friend or relative needs us. It is not just blessed to give; we also need to learn that it is okay to receive. When we receive, we allow someone else the opportunity to give.

**Get daily hugs.** Leo Buscaglia once said we all need at least ten hugs per day to maintain balanced mental health. We all need hugs. We all suffer from skin hunger. Reach out to the people who are close to you and ask for a hug. It often says more than words.

**Give support to others.** One of the gifts of grief is that it makes us more sensitive to the needs of others who are grieving. Become a "wounded healer" and reach out to others who are in pain. It will make a significant difference to the person in pain as well to yourself.

Grief is a part of life; no one can avoid it. When grief is experienced, growth can occur. When a loved one dies, our life changes. However, that does not mean that our life cannot once again be meaningful. When we decide to continue living, we honor the memory of our loved one who died. As we heal and begin to move on, let's remember the loved one and take the joys and memories of them with us as we proceed on our continuing journey.

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