

Spectrum Health Hospice and Palliative Care

Helpful Things To Do While Experiencing Grief and Loss

Think About Your Loss

Relive experiences in your thoughts. Allow the details and the emotions that come with them to be fully expressed. Explore memories as they arise. Trust that your system is bringing up these thoughts as part of your healing process. The repetition of painful memories helps flush out the strong emotions attached to them. Take time alone and time with others whom you trust and who will listen when you need to talk.

Talk About Your Loss

There is much release in talking about your loss. You may need to tell the same stories over and over as part of your healing. You may need to talk about your loss for a long time but wonder if anyone wants to hear about it anymore. Support groups are a place where you will always have the opportunity to be heard. Remember, you may be a rookie at the grief experience and not sure what to do. As with anything new, sometimes it's nice to have some help by talking with a friend or counselor.

Write About Your Loss

Keeping a journal isn't for everyone, but it can be a powerful tool for healing. Writing about feelings and events can help you to focus and identify emotions. Words can constructively channel fear and pain and create a record of your progress.

Cry About Your Loss

Tears can relieve a lot of pressure. Learn to trust your body's needs to cry or not to cry. There will be both wet spells and dry spells while you are grieving. Individuals use tears differently so respect your own relationship with tears. Be sure that you are not telling yourself that tears mean that you are weak or out of control. Allow yourself to feel whatever is there.

Make Space For Your Loss

Sometimes people lose their routines when someone dies and may feel that they have too much unstructured time in which to grieve. Others are so busy that they need to create quiet moments in which to allow their feelings. Sometimes you need a down day to just sit with your loss. Other days, you may feel the need to be as busy as possible. This is often the nature of grief, up and down, over and over. It happens because, as humans, we cannot take in all of the pain and the meaning of death at once, so we let in a little at a time. Respecting your needs for healing time and creating opportunities to grieve is important.

Take Care of Your Health

Grief is an exhausting process emotionally and physically. Do your best to get adequate food and rest. If you're due for a physical or have put off some health screening or follow up, make an appointment. Exercise can release a surprising amount of tension, anger and frustration. Try to get outdoors for some fresh air. Be gentle with yourself. Follow what feels healing for you and what connects you to the people and things you love.

Set Small Goals

For awhile, it may seem that much of life is without meaning. At times like these, small goals are helpful. Something to look forward to – meeting a friend for lunch next week or a movie tomorrow night – help you get through the immediate future. At first, don't be surprised if your enjoyment of these 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.

Accept Expressions of Caring

Try to accept the expressions of caring from others, even though they may be uneasy and awkward. Helping a friend or relative also suffering a similar loss may bring a feeling of closeness with that person. Knowing some things that helped them and realizing that they have recovered may give you hope that sometime in the future your grief will be less raw and painful.

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