
Information from your Primary Care Team

Bereavement, Grief & Mourning

Bereavement is the state of having lost a significant other to death.

Grief is the personal response to the loss.

Mourning is the public expression of that loss.

Grief Tips

The following are many ideas to help people who are mourning a loved one's death. Different kinds of losses dictate different responses, so not all of these ideas will suit everyone. Likewise, no two people grieve alike – what works for one may not work for another. Treat this list for what it is; a gathering of assorted suggestions that various people have tried with success. Perhaps what helped them will help you. The emphasis here is on specific, practical ideas.

Talk regularly with a friend. Talking with another about what you think and feel is one of the best things you can do for yourself. It helps relieve some of the pressure you may feel, it can give you a sense of perspective, and it keeps you in touch with others. Look for someone who's a good listener and who has a caring soul. Then speak what's on your mind and in your heart. If this feels one-sided let that be okay for this period of your life. Chances are the other person will find meaning in what they're doing, and time will come when you'll have the chance to be a good listener for someone else. You'll be a better listener then, if you're a good talker now.

Walk. Go for walks outside every day if you can. Don't overdo it, but walk briskly enough that it feels invigorating. Sometimes try walking slowly enough so you can look carefully at what you see. Observe what nature has to offer you, what it can teach you. Enjoy as much as you are able to of the sights and sounds that come your way. If you like, walk with another person.

Carry or wear a linking object. Carry something in your pocket or purse that reminds you of the one who died – a keepsake they gave you perhaps, or small object they once carried or used or a memento you select for just this purpose. You might wear a piece of their jewelry in the same way. Whenever you want, reach for gaze upon this object and remember what it signifies.

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Visit the grave. Not all people prefer to do this. But if it feels right to you, then do so. Don't let others convince you this is a morbid thing to do. Spend whatever time feels right there. Stand or sit in the quietness and do what comes naturally: be silent or talk, breathe deeply or cry, recollect or pray. You may wish to add your distinctive touch to the gravesite – straighten it a bit, or add little signs of your love.

Create a memory book. Compile photographs, which document your loved one's life. Arrange them into some sort of order so they tell a story. Add other elements if you want: diplomas, newspaper clippings, awards, accomplishments, and reminders of significant events. Put all this in a special binder and keep it for other people to look at if they wish. Go through it on your own if you desire. Reminisce as you do so.

Recall your dreams. Your dreams often have important things to say about your feelings and about your relationship with the one who died. Your dreams may be scary or sad, especially early on. They may seem weird or crazy to you. You may find that your loved one appears in your dreams. Accept your dreams for what they are and see what you can learn from them. No one knows that better than you.

Tell people what helps you and what doesn't. People around you may not understand what you need. So tell them. If hearing your loved one's name spoken aloud by others feels good, say so. If you need more time alone, or assistance with chores you're unable to complete, or an occasional hug, be honest. People can't read your mind, so you'll have to speak it.

Write things down. Most people who are grieving become more forgetful than usual. So help yourself remember what you want by keeping track of it on paper or with whatever system works best for you. This may include writing down things you want to preserve about the person who has died.

Ask for a copy of the memorial service. If the funeral liturgy or memorial service holds special meaning for you because of what was spoken or read, ask for the words. Whoever participated in that ritual will feel gratified that what they prepared was appreciated. Turn to these words whenever you want. Some people find that these thoughts provide even more help weeks and months after the service.

Remember the serenity prayer. This prayer is attributed to theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, but it's actually an ancient German prayer. It has brought comfort and support to many that have suffered various kinds of afflictions. "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference."

Create a memory area at home. In a space that feels appropriate, arrange a small table that honors the person: a framed photograph or two, perhaps a prized possession or award or something they created or something they loved. This might be placed on a small table, a mantel or a desk. Some people like to use a grouping of candles, representing not

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just the person who died but others who have died as well. In that case a variety of candles can be arranged each representing a unique life.

Drink water. Grieving people can easily become dehydrated. Crying can naturally lead to that. And with your normal routines turned upside down, you may simply not drink as much or as regularly as you did before this death. Make this a way you care for yourself.

Use your hands. Sometimes there's value in doing repetitive things with your hands, something you don't have to think about very much because it becomes second nature. Knitting and crocheting are like that. So are carving, woodworking, polishing, solving jigsaw puzzles, painting, braiding, shoveling, washing, and countless other activities.

Give yourself respites from your grief. Just because you're grieving doesn't mean you must always be feeling sad or forlorn. There's value in sometimes consciously deciding that you'll think about something else for awhile, or that you'll do something you've always enjoyed doing. Sometimes this happens naturally and it's only later you realize that your grief has taken a back seat. Let it, this is not an indication you love that person any less or that you're forgetting them. It's a sign that you're human and you need relief from the unrelenting pressure. It can also be a healthy sign you're healing.

Create or commission a memory quilt. Sew or invite others to sew with you, or hire someone to sew for you. However you get it completed, put together a wall hanging or a bedroom quilt that remembers the important life events of the one who died. Take your time doing this. Make it what it is, a labor of love.

See a grief counselor. If you're concerned about how you're feeling and how well you're adapting make an appointment with a counselor who specializes in grief. Often you'll learn what you need both about grief and about yourself as a griever in only a few sessions. Ask questions of the counselor before you sign on. What specific training does he or she have? What accreditation? A person who is a family therapist or a psychologist doesn't necessarily understand the unique issues of someone in grief.

Begin your day with your loved one. If your grief is young, you'll probably wake up thinking of that person anyway. So why not decide that you'll include her or him from the start? Focus this time in a positive way. Bring to your mind fulfilling memories. Recall lessons that this person taught you, gifts he or she gave you. Think about how you can spend your day in ways that would be keeping in with your loved one's best self and with your best self. Then carry that best self with you through your day.

Invite some one to be your telephone buddy. If your grief and sadness hit you especially hard at times and you have no one nearby to turn to, ask someone you trust to be your telephone buddy. Ask their permission for you to call them whenever you feel you're at loose ends, day or night. Then put their number beside your phone and call them if you need them. Don't abuse the privilege, of course. And covenant that some day it will be

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payback time – someday you'll make yourself available to help someone else in the same way you've been helped. That will help you accept the care you're receiving.

Avoid certain people if you must. No one likes to be unfriendly or cold. But if there are people in your life who make it very difficult for you to do your grieving then do what you can to stay out of their way. Some people may lecture you or belittle you.

Donate their possessions meaningfully. Whether you give your loved one's personal possessions to someone you know or to a stranger, find ways to pass these things along so that others might benefit from them. Family members or friends might like to receive keepsakes. They or others might deserve tools, utensils, books or sporting equipment. Philanthropic organizations can put clothes to good use. Some wish to do this quickly following the death, while others wish to wait awhile.

Donate in the other's name. Honor the other's memory and spirit by giving a gift or gifts to a cause the other would appreciate. A favorite charity? A local fundraiser? A building project? Extend that person's influence even further.

Take a yoga class. People of almost any age can do yoga. More than conditioning your body, it helps you relax and focus your mind. It can be woven into a practice of meditation. It's a gentle art for that time in your life when you deserve gentleness all around you.

Connect on the Internet. If you're computer savvy, search the Internet. You'll find many resources for people in grief, as well as the opportunity to chat with fellow grievers. You can link up with others without leaving your home. You'll also find more to expand your horizons as a person who is beginning to grow.

Speak to a clergyperson. If you're searching for answers to the larger questions about life and death, religion and spirituality, consider talking with a representative of your faith, or even another's faith. Consider becoming a spiritual friend with another and making your time of grieving a time of personal exploring.

Read of how others have responded to a loved one's death. You may feel that your own grief is all you can handle. But if you'd like to look at the ways others have done it, try: • *Beyond Grief: A Guide for Recovering from the Death of a Loved One* by Carol Staudacher • *Grief's Courageous Journey* by Sandi Caplan and Gordon Lang • *The Grief Recovery Handbook: The Action Program for Moving Beyond Death, Divorce, & Other Losses* by James & Friedman • *A Grief Observed* by C.S. Lewis • *Widow* by Lynn Cane • *When Good-Bye Is Forever* by John Bramlette • *Men and Grief* by Carol Staudacher or • *Nichlas Wolterstorff's Lament for a Son*. There are many others. Check with a librarian.

Learn about your loved one from others. Listen to the stories others have to tell about the one, who died, stories you're familiar with and those you've never heard before. Spend

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time with their friends, schoolmates or colleagues. Invite them into your home. Solicit the writings of others. Preserve whatever you find out. Celebrate your time together.

Take a day off. When the mood is just right, take a one-day vacation. Do whatever you want, or don't do whatever you want. Travel somewhere or stay inside by yourself. Be very active or don't do anything at all. Just make it your day, whatever that means for you.

Invite someone to give you feedback. Select someone you trust, preferably someone familiar with the working of grief, to give you his or her reaction when you ask for it. If you want to check out how clearly you're thinking, how accurately you're remembering, how effectively you're coping, go to that person. Pose your questions, and then listen to their responses. What you choose to do with that information will be up to you.

Vent your anger rather than hold it in. You may feel awkward being angry when you're grieving, but anger is a common reaction. The expression holds true: anger is best out floating rather than in bloating. Even if you feel a bit ashamed as you do it, find ways to get it out of your system. Yell, even if it's in an empty house. Cry. Resist the temptation to be proper. Go for a brisk walk. Do a long, hard workout. Vacuum up a storm. Do some yard work. Physical activity helps release anger.

Give thanks every day. Whatever has happened to you, you still have things to be thankful for. Perhaps it's your memories, your remaining family, your support, your work; you own health – all sorts of things. Draw your attention to those parts of life that are worth appreciating, and then appreciate them.

Monitor signs of dependency. While it's normal to become more dependent upon others for awhile immediately after a death, it will not be helpful to continue in that role long-term. Watch for signs that you're prolonging your need for assistance. Congratulate yourself when you do things for yourself.