

Realistic Expectations During the Grief Process

Our grief is as individual as our lives, and often times will resonate in different and surprising ways as we move towards understanding and awareness. Just remember that anything you experience or feel during grief is normal. You are a normal person living through an abnormally hard time. The following notes are to help guide you through the grief process and to highlight the often misguided notions we have about grief and the grief process.

“You will never be the old normal. But you learn to build a new normal by acknowledging and expressing your grief”

Grief will take longer than most people think.

Grief takes more energy that we ever imagine.

Grief shows itself in all spheres of our life, in the emotional, social, physical, mental, and spiritual.

We feel grief not only for the actual person we lost, but also for our hopes, dreams, unfilled expectations, and unmet needs.

New losses bring up unresolved grief from our past, often forcing us to cope with an array of confusing feelings at once.

Sometimes grief makes us feel we “are going crazy”

Society has unrealistic expectations about grief and the mourning process and people may respond inappropriately to you.

Grief may cause a variety of physical symptoms, like sleeplessness, tightness in the chest, and decreased energy.

Family members may not always provide the support we expect. And their grief may be very different from ours. Sometimes people have the necessary social support to help them through loss. But more often, they need to reach out for support, let others know what they need, and actively build a network that facilitates personal growth and renewal.

Journey Through Grief

- Acknowledge the reality of the death
- Embrace the pain of the loss
- Remember the person who died
- Develop a new self-identity
- Search for meaning
- Receive ongoing support from others

Healing Feelings: Traumatic Grief and Beyond

A Process Model of Recovery in the Aftermath of Death and Loss

Managing stress involves honoring the grief process, whether it be positive or negative. All of us, no matter what our job or background, will experience stress or grief, whether it's the loss of a job, or relationship, a loss of hope, a financial crisis, or the death of a loved one. That's a fact and it can feel out of control. The good news is that we can take back our power and get the help we deserve.

The Center for Living With Dying has created four steps to stress management— acknowledge, express, act, and celebrate— to build the 'new normal.'

Acknowledge what has happened to you and your reactions.

It is a reflection of the depth of your love and caring. Don't minimize or negate your grief.

The first step is to accept that you are a normal person living through an abnormally painful time. You are entitled to your feelings.

Steps to Acknowledge

- List your fears
- Focus on what is most difficult to handle RIGHT NOW
- What do you need to do to help the situation RIGHT NOW

Express your feelings and issues.

By expressing yourself, you are bringing your feelings from inside the body to the outside. You are making what you feel into something tangible— either visually or verbally.

Ways to Express

- Letter Writing— make it uncensored, only you will see it
- Talk— see a nonjudgmental support person
- Exercise

Act

Create as much meaning and ceremony as you can to bring closure to the event of loss. Do something active that will acknowledge your pain and help you transform it into the remembering of the love. Normalize the rest of your life as much as possible. Do not change too much at one time. If there are other life changes you have no control over, acknowledge them. Realize that you only have to deal with the most pressing issue right now.

Tips on Action Steps

- Do specific concrete actions to facilitate the changes you are experiencing
- Bring closure in the company of friends and family
- Do something playful, fun, relaxing

Celebrate

Give yourself the opportunity to acknowledge your victories. Look back at what you have survived and accomplished. Do something fun and life affirming which rewards you for a job well done.

We are all wounded
inside in some way or
other.

We all carry
unhappiness within
us for some reason
or another,

Which is why we
need a little
gentleness and
healing from one
another.

Healing in words,
healing beyond
words.

- Ben Okri

Comforting a Grieving Individual

Many people feel inadequate about what to say to a friend or family member who is grieving. This guide to comforting a grieving individual covers both words that offer comfort and words, that while well intended, may harm or stifle the bereaved, making the journey through grief more difficult.

Words that Comfort

I'm sorry.

I'm thinking of you.

I care and want to help.

I'm here for you.

*If I were in your shoes, I think I'd
feel that way too*

*One of my favorite memories of
_____ (use the name of the
person) is...*

*It seems so natural to cry at a time
like this.*

*I don't know what to say but I
know this must be very difficult for
you.*

Do you feel like talking for a while?

How do you feel today?

Words that May Not Comfort

Now she's in a better place.

Time will heal you.

*Think of all you have to be thankful
for.*

*Just be happy that he's out of his
pain.*

Be strong. You are holding up well.

Keep busy.

Try not to think about it.

*He wouldn't have wanted you to
be sad.*

This is a blessing

Now you have an angel in heaven.

You shouldn't feel that way.

Stop acting like a baby.

You need to be strong.

Saying nothing or pretending the death didn't happen also hurts the individual in the long run. It is important for this person to hear words of comfort from you and especially from friends, family members, or colleagues to whom he/she is close.