

GRIEF

Stepping Stones



A Guide to help you through your Grief Journey

Someone you loved has died. You are now faced with the difficult, but important, need to mourn. This open expression of mourning is an essential part of healing. You may experience a variety of emotions as part of your grief work.

1. Shock and denial *"I can't believe this has happened."*
2. Loneliness and vulnerability *"Without my loved one, my life is empty."*
3. Tears and weeping *"I can't stop crying."*
4. Pain and hurt *"I just can't take this anymore."*
5. Panic and anxiety *"What am I going to do?"*
6. Guilt and regret *"I should have done more."*
7. Anger and frustration *"How could this happen to me?"*
8. Depression and sadness *"Will life ever be worth living again?"*
9. Hope and fulfillment *"I still have a lot of living left to do."*
10. Recovery and readjustment *"My loved one would want me to adjust to life again."*

"Life will be very difficult following your loss; yet with time, the assistance and support of your family, and your own perseverance and courage, you will build a new life that will have both happiness and quality."

Some may experience many emotions of grief while others may experience only a few. They do not progress in any particular order, as everyone grieves in their own unique way. Your experience will be influenced by a variety of factors: the relationship you had with the person who has passed away, the circumstances surrounding the death, your

emotional support system, your cultural background, as well as your spiritual and religious beliefs.



“The passage of time gently washes away some layers of sorrow and helps us cope with the reality of our own personal loss.”

TIPS TO HELP YOU HEAL

The following grief tips are a collection of wisdom from people who have experienced mourning first-hand. The authors of these tips have walked the journey of grief. Their insights and suggestions may help you in your grief journey.

1. Talk regularly with a friend. Pain shared is pain diminished. Sharing your thoughts and feelings with a trusted friend helps relieve some of the pressure created by grief. *“The common denominator of grief is loneliness... Talk to a friend, share your feelings. Let the right people know that you need support and feedback. They cannot bring you comfort unless you allow them to enter your sorrow.”* Rabbi Earl Grollman

2. Plan at least one thing to do each day. Although grief is painful and energy is low, plan to complete at least one task daily. Doing this will help you feel as though you are making some progress in your life. Also, this provides some control over your life and can help you believe that you are not entirely at the mercy of this overwhelming experience.

3. Plant something as a living memorial. You can do this by yourself in your own yard. Planting a flower, bush or tree in memory of your loved one connects you to life, not death.

4. Tell friends what helps and what doesn't. Most people are untutored when it comes to bereavement. People want to help, but will sometimes speak and act clumsily. Tell them what helps. For example, if you want to hear your loved one's name spoken, tell them.

5. Keep a journal. Write out your thoughts and feelings. Don't censor yourself - be honest and blunt. Only you will read the journal. Later, as you re-read what has been written you will be amazed to see how much you have changed and grown.

6. Rest. Grieving is exhausting. Don't get down on yourself if you tire easily. Pace yourself. Renew yourself. Be compassionate with yourself.

7. Get physical. Walk. Jog. Get moving. Stretching your muscles and expanding your lungs will make you feel well emotionally and strengthen you physically.

8. Join a support group. The best helpers are those who have been there. Support groups are not for everyone, but many who have gone to a support group testify to the great help, encouragement and inspiration received.

9. Write letters to your loved one. This is one way of saying some of the things you didn't have the opportunity, or the courage, to say in life. Some people like to keep what they write as part of their journal.

10. Light a candle at mealtime. This is especially helpful for those living alone and eating alone. Light a candle in memory of your loved one and pause to remember them as you light it.

11. Pamper yourself. Grief is such an overwhelming experience that a basic simple pleasure can provide an interlude and some relief. Get a massage, watch a movie, go to a sporting event, lounge in a bubble bath, read a novel, enjoy your favourite treat. Both your mind and body are in the process of healing and need to be pampered periodically.

12. Invite someone to be your phone friend. For those times when grief hits fast and hard, the phone can be a life line. Call this friend whenever you need to talk and hear a reassuring voice.

13. Take steps to create a new life for yourself. Once you are past the initial heavy period of mourning, look for ways of adding to your life. Take up a new hobby, travel, enroll in a new class, volunteer.

14. Take advantage of the resources available in your community. Borrow a book on coping with your loss from the Brockie Donovan library, read the grief and loss articles on our website, and plan to attend the free Grief & Loss Seminars here at Brockie Donovan.

15. Find caring people. Establish a support network of family, friends, neighbours and colleagues. Such a network can give support and help you heal.

16. Give it time. Everyone reacts differently to a loss. It is hard to estimate a “normal” grieving period, because there is no “normal” grieving period. Expect that recovery and adjustment may take longer than you think, and try not to put pressure on yourself. *“It will take as long as it takes.”*

17. Understand grief. Read all you can about bereavement. That will help you know what to expect and will help you be more patient with yourself.

18. Reach out for help. Be brave enough to accept the help of others. Don’t go it alone. Don’t pretend nothing is wrong. Friends usually welcome the opportunity to provide a listening ear and support.

19. Accept the inevitable. Some things just don’t make sense... they just happen. Accept the enigma of life; this can prevent much bitterness and emotional torment.

20. Delay making major changes. Unless absolutely necessary, don’t move, quit your job, make new investments, sell off parts of the estate, etc. Wait at least six months (one year is even better). By then you will have a better perspective on what needs to be addressed.

21. Cultivate seeds of hope. From time to time, examine your life and cultivate seeds of hope. Try reminding yourself that change and growth takes time, just like a growing plant. Allow yourself to be hopeful your heart will find peace with this loss and you will live again.

22. Take care of yourself. Get adequate sleep, good nutrition and exercise to help yourself build up a resistance to the stress of grieving.

23. Embrace change. Accept the fact that the details of your life will and must change. Choose to move forward. Grief changes you, but you will heal and will learn to live again. The loss of a loved one will always be felt however you will learn to live with it in your life.



Remember these grief lessons

"I'm okay... but not okay... and that's okay. I am still walking on Jupiter where the gravity of grief is great. The air is thin and my tears fall as generously as spring rains. Yes, I have moments of sweet relief and happiness is returning – but grief and sorrow linger. I cannot run from sorrow any more than I can run from my shadow on a sunny day. I must learn to live with love and sorrow... there seems no other way. I'm okay... but not okay... and that's okay. That is part of being human."

Mitchell's Journey



BE COMPASSIONATE WITH YOURSELF

- The journey through grief is a long and difficult one. It is also a journey for which there is no preparation.
- Be compassionate with yourself as you encounter painful thoughts and feelings of loss and grief.
- Don't judge yourself or try to set a particular course for healing.
- Let your journey be what it is. And let yourself – your new, grieving self – be who you are.

Look at yourself in the mirror and say,
"I am mourning. I will be compassionate with myself as I mourn this death in my own unique way and in my own time."

BE AWARE THAT YOUR GRIEF AFFECTS YOUR BODY, HEART, SOCIAL SELF & SPIRIT

- Grief is physically demanding. The body responds to the stress of the encounter and the immune system can weaken. You may be more susceptible to illness and physical discomforts. You may also feel lethargic or highly fatigued.
- The emotional toll of grief is complex and painful. We often feel many different feelings, and those feelings can shift and blur over time.
- Bereavement naturally results in social discomfort. Friends and family often withdraw from mourners, leaving us isolated and unsupported.
- We often ask ourselves, *“Why go on living?”* *“Will my life have meaning now?”* *“Where is God in this?”* Spiritual questions such as these are natural and necessary but also draining.

No doubt you are physically impacted by your grief. Make an appointment to see a doctor this week.

Sometimes it's comforting to receive a clean bill of health.





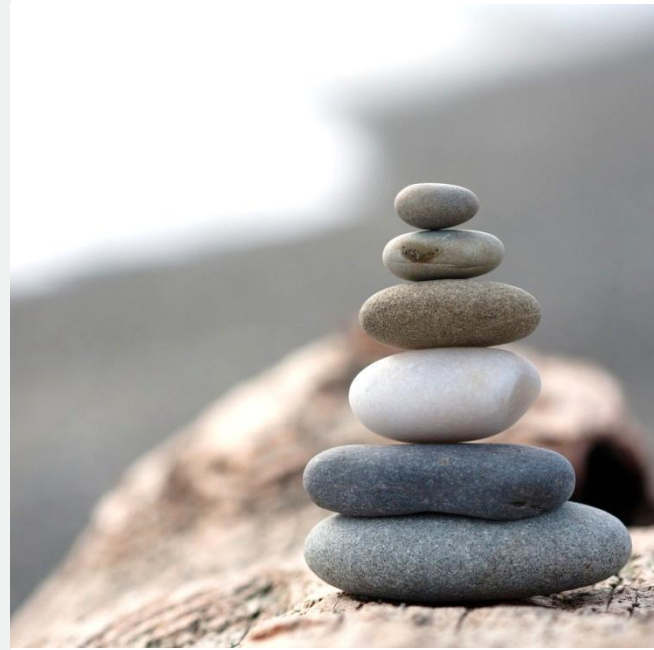
SAY THEIR NAME

- When you're talking about the death of a loved one or about their life in general, don't avoid using their name.
- Saying their name lets others know they can say it too.
- Acknowledge the significance of the death by talking about the person who died: *"I remember when David..."*, *"I was thinking of Sarah today because..."*
- Encourage your friends and family to use their name. They cannot remind you of someone who you are thinking of already. We often love to hear that special name.

Look up the meaning of their name. Reflect on the name's meaning as it relates to the unique person you loved.

CRY

- Tears are a natural cleansing and healing mechanism. It's OK to cry. In fact, it's good to cry when you feel like it. What's more, tears are a form of mourning. They are sacred.
- On the other hand, don't feel bad if you aren't crying a lot. Not everyone is a crier.
- You may find that those around you are uncomfortable with your tears. As a society, we're often not so good at witnessing others in pain.
- Explain to your friends and family that you need to cry right now and that they can help by allowing you to.
- You may find yourself crying at unexpected times or places. This is normal and it is all part of the healing process. Remember to be compassionate with yourself, like you would to others.



If you need to have
a good cry – do it.
Find a safe place to
embrace your pain
and cry as long
and as hard as you
want to.

HAVE Hope

Hope is renewed when...

- We talk, express and explore our feelings – no matter how painful they are.
- We tap into the resource of faith.
- We deal honestly and openly with our grief.
- We light a candle rather than curse the darkness.
- We practice forgiveness, of others and ourselves.
- We focus upon what is left and not upon what has been taken away.
- We commit to facing our grief and taking small steps toward healing ourselves each and every day.

When someone you love has died, you know that your life will never be the same again. Time is a great healer and it is important to remember that the intensity of these feelings do begin to change as time moves on. It isn't that you forget the person you lost – it means you are healing.



Call us at (204)727-0694 for
additional grief support.

