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Loss and Grief - Activities to Help You Grieve

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Losing someone special, regardless of the relationship, can be difficult.

Here are several practical suggestions that may assist in your journey of healing and growth:

- **Take care of yourself physically.** Grief can take its toll on a person's physical well-being. It's important to do your best to get adequate rest, to eat regularly, to take a walk or enjoy other forms of exercise that appeal to you.
- **Forgive.** Even in the best of relationships, there are usually memories that need healing. As you think about your relationship with your loved one and bring to mind areas of hurt or regret, give yourself permission to forgive. This may involve forgiving the person for the times he or she failed you, and it may involve forgiving yourself. This isn't easy, but it's an important step in moving forward. If the hurts you carry are deep and difficult to forgive, consider seeking professional help.
- **Explore your spirituality.** Times of solitude, inspirational reading, prayer, meditation, and community worship can provide comfort and enlightenment as you cope with your loss. Losing a special person can deepen and strengthen your spiritual life. Nourish yourself spiritually in whatever way works best for you—prayer, song, worship, meditation, or study of scripture. Ask questions, and then allow yourself to be open to the inner guidance you receive. Listen to the whispers of your heart and soul.
- **"Talk" with the person you lost.** During moments of solitude, perhaps late at night or early in the morning, talk to the person you lost as if s/he were right there with you. Say whatever is on your mind, everything you wished you had said while s/he was still alive. After speaking, take a few moments to allow yourself the time to feel a sense of peace.
- **Write letters.** Similar to the exercise above, write several letters to the person you lost. In the first letter or two, openly express whatever feelings you might be experiencing. Don't censor yourself. If you feel angry, lonely, depressed, fearful, happy, or relieved, say so. The key is to allow yourself to say what's on your mind and in your heart. Once you've done so, write a final letter of gratitude to them. Let him/her know what you appreciate and what you've been grateful for throughout the years.
- **Treasure fond memories.** There are several ways in which you may want to treasure fond memories of your special person. You may choose to collect mementos and put them in a scrapbook, or put together a video collage of photos collected over the years, or host a potluck dinner for family and friends and record stories they share about the person. Do whatever helps you create lasting memories that you can go back to in the days ahead.
- **Take time with your special person's personal belongings.** You need not sort through your special person's personal belongings right away. According to grief specialist Dr. Alan Wolfelt: "You, and only you, should decide what is done with their clothes and personal belongings. Don't force yourself to go through these things until you're ready to. Take your time. When you have the energy to go through them, you will."
- **Honor your special person.** Think of something you would like to do that would be significant or meaningful to your special person. Maybe s/he volunteered at the local meal program, so you decide to volunteer or contribute to the same program. If the person sewed quilts for the local children's hospital, you might continue in her footsteps. Whatever you choose to do, make it something that will help you celebrate your special person's life and memory.
- **Work through your grief.** The only way out of your grief is through it. Try to accept your feelings, whatever they may be. Grief is a natural process, nature's way of bringing us to acceptance, healing and peace. As painful as it can be, allow yourself to experience your emotions and get through them.

- **Share your pain and hope with others.** Give your grief words, and find at least one person you trust and respect with whom you can comfortably share your emotions. Pour out your heart and soul as often as you need. Consider seeking counseling from a professional, as many people find this very helpful.
- **Complete “unfinished business”.** Try to be aware of anything associated to your special person that remains unfinished. Do whatever you feel is important to reach a sense of closure.
- **Be kind to yourself.** You’ve suffered a great loss. You need to give yourself special care, including taking the time to rest, eating healthfully, exercising, and socializing with family and friends. Be gentle and understanding with yourself--treat yourself as you would a dear friend if she were suffering.
- **Let yourself cry.** Sobbing promotes relaxation and the release of tension and sorrow. Tears are nature’s ways of cleansing and healing. Crying is a gift; allow yourself to receive it.
- **Tune into what you are feeling.** Depression, anger, fear, guilt, regret, loneliness, relief, peace—whatever your feelings, let yourself experience them. Gently pay attention to your body and to your feelings as they arise.
- **Reach out to others.** Though you will likely need time to yourself, it’s also important that you share your thoughts and feelings with others. Find a few people you respect and trust, and pour out your heart. Let your friends and family know what you need from them—a listening ear, a hug, or just time together.
- **Postpone unnecessary changes.** Try to hold off on major decisions or unnecessary changes. Give yourself some time before deciding to move or making a career change. Allow yourself first to grieve and heal. You’ll then have a fresher perspective and more energy for getting on with your life.
- **Accept the difficult memories.** Your special person has died, but the life you shared and the many memories are still very much alive. All relationships include good times and difficult times. We’ve all made mistakes and have regrets. Give your special person and yourself the gift of forgiveness. Learn from the painful times, then let them go.
- **Cherish your fond memories.** Allow yourself to enjoy all of the wonderful memories you and your special person have shared. Treasure these memories and let them be lifelong companions that comfort you and cheer you.
- **Surround yourself with things that are alive.** The authors of "How to Survive the Loss of a Love" recommend that you add new life to your environment: “In addition to family and friends, invite other living things into your life—a new plant, a stray kitten, the puppy you’ve always wanted, some goldfish, or a fresh bowl of your favorite fruit.”
- **Be adventuresome.** After you’ve given yourself plenty of space to grieve and heal—and only you can know how long that will take—it’s time to make some fresh starts. Think about what you’d love to do. Let yourself dream, then follow your heart and take some risks. Redecorate, launch into a hobby that interests you, or explore new people, places and ideas.

For more information see:

- *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss* (2005) by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler
- *Caregiving and Loss* (2001) edited by Kenneth J. Doka and Joyce D. Davidson
- *Surviving the Loss of a Spouse* (2006) edited by Sheryl Garrett
- *Death of a Parent: Transition to a New Adult Identity* (2003) by Debra Umberson
- *Death of a Parent: Reflections for Adults Mourning the Loss of a Father or Mother* (2003) by Delle Chatman, William Kenneally & William Kenneally
- *Caregiving: The Spiritual Journey of Love, Loss, and Renewal* (1999) by Beth Witrogen McLeod

Adapted with permission from GriefWorks, Sam Quick, Professor Emeritus, Human Development and Family Relations Specialist, Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

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