



Suggestions for Moving through Grief

BE PATIENT

Over the past several decades, psychologists and grief counselors have shown how grief tends to move through stages. Understanding these stages can be very helpful, but we need to avoid the false impression that grieving has an end point or that it moves neatly through these stages in an orderly fashion. The truth is—no matter the commonalities

body, mind, heart, and spirit. All the commonplace needs for self-care are doubly important when going through the aftermath of death and loss. Eat healthy foods. Stay hydrated. Avoid excess alcohol or other mind-numbing depressants. Exercise regularly. Take deep breaths and try to get fresh air each day. Follow a regular regimen around going to bed. Take short naps in order to get adequate rest. Even

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to the various stages of denial, anger, sadness, and acceptance (to name a few)—grief is not a straightforward path, and it is different for everyone. One may find some rays of light dawning one day, only to be plunged into darkness the next. It's important to be patient and to give yourself the time you need to heal from the devastation of loss. And if others expect you to be "over it," ignore them. Only you can gauge the movements of bereavement in your own life.

PRACTICE SELF-CARE

It is not uncommon for those who grieve to become run down and drained of all physical and emotional energy. Grief takes a toll on the

when you don't *feel* like doing any of these things, do them anyway. If you are someone who tends to put others' needs before your own, practicing self-care can be a challenge. Just remember that you can't do much for others when you are completely deflated.

FEED YOUR HEART AND SOUL

In addition to physical needs, it's also important to care for the heart and soul. Being in nature is often a restorative practice that lifts the spirit while also refreshing the mind and heart. Music can create a connection with a loved one, particularly through particular songs or artists. It might make you sad at first, but it will, in time, also provide conso-

lation. Read a good book or visit an art museum. Engage in something creative. Savor a bit of lightheartedness by watching a funny movie or reading a good novel. Nourishing the soul doesn't mean banishing your grief, but it can help to lighten the burden.

STAY CONNECTED

Grieving can be a lonely and isolating experience. When friends and loved ones reach out and ask what they can do to support you, take them seriously. Those who are sincere may not know what to do, and neither might you, so here are some suggestions: Invite a friend or family member to accompany you on a walk. Welcome an offer to help with housecleaning, shopping, childcare, and other responsibilities that seem too much to take on at this point. Ask a trusted companion to call on a regular basis to lend a listening ear. In addition to these one-on-one connections, seek the support of a community. Consider taking part in a grief support group. Participate in weekly or daily worship or prayer gatherings. As your energy returns, volunteer to help with a local initiative to help those in need.

SET LIMITS

The flip side to keeping connected is recognizing the need for boundaries. Bereavement can make us even more vulnerable when confronted with too much company or dis-

traction. Avoid “energy vampires”—those whose own neediness overshadows their recognition of anyone else. Be discriminating when it comes to those with whom you share your grief. In this way, you aren't drained by those who mean well but who also don't understand your need for privacy and space. Turn off the news and curtail the time spent on social media. If you find yourself slipping deeper into depression, seek help from those most qualified and able to help—counselors, spiritual directors, or therapists who have expertise in dealing with grief and loss.

LEAN INTO PRAYER

Prayer can be both a solace and a challenge during a time of bereavement. Some turn easily to God for consolation and hope, while others find themselves in a dry and desolate place. The best we might do, then, is to let go of expectations around the “right” way to pray and simply give ourselves over to God's care. Reading the psalms can be particularly helpful as they express a wide range of human emotion—from hope and joy to lamentation and despair. Such prayer reminds us that God's love is eternal and ever-present, no matter what we are going through or how we feel. Take seriously those who offer to pray *for* you. Allowing someone else to lift a bit of the burden on your heart and soul can be the greatest comfort of all.

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