

As You Grieve

What you may need...

Time-Trust that grief is a natural reaction and it does take time. There are no “short cuts.” And while time itself does not actually heal, as time goes on, you will likely sense that some of your grief reactions are not as raw or intense.

Space- There almost certainly will be times you just need to be alone with your grief, and that’s ok. Well meaning friends may want to fill your time, but you are the one who knows what you need, and you may need to set some boundaries, even with those closest to you.

People- There also will be times you may feel a sense of isolation and you will yearn to be around others. Sometimes being with people gives you a type of respite from your heavy emotions.

Routine- - Like other parts of your life, your daily routine may be different than before the loss, but it is good to have a routine to ground you.

Downtime- Though it’s good to have routine, you will likely find you that whether you are alone or with others, you will need time that is not filled with to-dos or even other activities, time to just BE.

Healthy outlets for emotion-With all of the various emotions that are coming to the surface, some with great intensity, it is helpful to find, continue, or rediscover some activities that allow you to release some of your emotional energy. This might be exercise, writing, creating, or any activity that appeals to you and fills this need.

Nurturing- Whether this is done by others or yourself, as you face the feelings of being bruised and battered by your grief, it is important to find those things that bring you a sense of peace and wholeness.

Hope- Hope is universal human need, but can be defined on an individual basis. What do you hope for? What gives you hope?

Emotional Freedom- Feeling allowed to experience (and then re-experience) a wide range of emotions and reactions, as well as remembering that there is not a set sequence to these reactions, is essential to healthy grieving. You may sense you are “backsliding” but it is all a part of the grief journey.

Empathy- This is different than pity or sympathy. It happens when someone takes your perspective and allows you to feel your emotions in your way. It is judgment-free and compassionate.

What you can do...

Be patient with yourself and with the process- Because grief is not something to get over, but a process to walk through, in your own way, at your own pace, day by day.

Set good boundaries-You are your own grief expert and you know intuitively what you need. Trust yourself. Gently educate those who you trust on what it is you may need (being alone, or spending time talking about your loved one, crying, laughing, just being quiet, or whatever you find you need at that moment).

Accept invitations when it feels right- And if no one is calling, don't be afraid to reach out to a trusted friend and say you just need to get out for a walk or lunch.

Find a daily rhythm that works for you- Many people find comfort in establishing a daily routine of some kind. It's good to think about what gets you up and going in the morning, and what grounds you during the day. Additionally, as you set small goals for yourself each day, you are able to have a sense of accomplishment.

Take breaks or "mini-vacations"- When you are under emotional stress, even small tasks can feel daunting. So if you start to feel overwhelmed, give yourself permission to do something easy or fun, or just rest.

Take care of yourself in all the ways you can physically-Concentrate on good nutrition, drink plenty of water, exercise (in ways that you enjoy), avoid too much alcohol or caffeine.

Take care of yourself in all the ways you can emotionally and spiritually-This is a great way to nurture yourself. To do this, it helps to ask: What feeds my soul? What are those things that have brought me comfort and peace in the past as I have faced life's challenges?

Seek out others who have experienced a loss - This might happen in support groups, or maybe more privately by reading a book or finding a website dedicated to a specific type of loss. This not only helps when you are feeling isolated in your grief, it also provides a sense of hope as you witness others coming through their grief experience, perhaps with a new sense of peace and strength.

Be deliberate in choosing people to surround you- Especially when you are feeling your grief more heavily, choose those who don't try to "fix" your grief or those who belittle it. Find that inner circle of people who are willing to just be present with you.

Be gentle with yourself. Sometimes grief will be an experience of simply and slowly taking one step at a time. The loss of a loved one is a major life event, and just like you wouldn't try to climb a mountain after a major surgery, you shouldn't expect yourself to jump back into life as if nothing happened. Remember to treat yourself gently in your grief, and also to allow others to be present with you and offer their love and support to you during this time.