

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR HELPING YOURSELF THROUGH GRIEF**

This title is not meant to indicate that others in our lives do not help us through grief. We do need the help of relatives and friends, and may need the help of professional counselling. At the same time, it is important for us to make the effort to help ourselves. Remember that grief takes a lot of energy. Treat yourself with the same care and attention that you would offer to a good friend in the same situation. Most of us are aware of “LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR” – we forget the part – “AS YOU LOVE YOURSELF”. Not all suggestions will be helpful to everyone. Grief has its unique sides. Choose the ideas that appeal to you.

### **BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF**

- Go gently. Don't rush too much. Your body, mind and heart need energy to mend.
- Don't take on new responsibilities right away. Don't overextend yourself. Keep decision making to a minimum.
- Don't compare yourself to other bereaved. It may seem that you aren't adjusting as well as they; in reality you don't know what's behind their public façade.
- Throw away notions of a fixed period of mourning: One year and then you're “over it.” This is fiction. Grief takes time, whatever time it takes.

### **ASK FOR AND ACCEPT HELP**

- Don't be afraid to ask for help from those close to you when you need it. So much hurt and pain go unheeded during grief because we don't want to bother anyone else with our problems. Wouldn't you want someone close to you to ask for help if they needed it? Our family and friends can't read our minds. Some relatives and friends will not be able to handle your grief. It is very important to find someone who cares, and understands with whom you may talk freely. Seek out an understanding friend, another bereaved person or a support group member.
- Accept help and support when offered. It is okay to need comforting. Often people wait to be told when you're ready to talk or if you need anything. Tell them.
- Pray to the person who has died.
- If you are troubled and need help, contact your local twenty-four hour hotline.
- Join a self-help group. They offer support, understanding, friendship and HOPE.

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- Give yourself some time to sort out your thoughts but don't build a wall around yourself in fear of being hurt again. It is important to love and enjoy the people in your life instead of distancing yourself from them.
- If grief is intense and prolonged, it may harm your physical and mental well being. If it is necessary, seek out a competent counselor. Check to see if your health insurance covers the charges. It is important to take care of yourself.

## **ACCEPT YOUR FEELINGS**

- Feel what you feel. You don't choose your emotions; they choose you.
- It's okay to cry. Crying makes you feel better.
- It's okay to be angry. You may be angry with yourself, God, the person who died, others, or just angry in general. Don't push it down. Let it out (hit on a pillow or punching bag, scream, swim, chop wood, exercise, etc.).
- Thinking you are going crazy is a very normal reaction. Most grieving people experience this. You are not losing your mind, only reacting to the death.
- Depression is common to those in grief. Be careful not to totally withdraw yourself from others. If your depression becomes severe or you're considering suicide, get professional help immediately.
- The emotions of a survivor are often raw. It is important to let these feelings out. If you don't, they will come out some other time, some other way. That is certain. You won't suffer nearly as much from "getting too upset" as you will from being brave and keeping your honest emotions all locked inside. Share your "falling to pieces" with supportive loved ones, as often as you feel the need.
- You may have psychosomatic complaints, physical problems brought on by an emotional reaction. The physical problems are real; take steps to remedy them.

## **LEAN INTO THE PAIN**

- Lean into the pain. It cannot be outrun. You can't go around it, over it or under it; you must go through it and feel the full force of the pain to survive. Be careful not to get stuck at some phase. Keep working on your grief.
- Save time to grieve and time to face the grief. Don't throw yourself into your work or other activities that leave you no time for grieving.
- In a time of severe grief be extremely careful in the use of either alcohol or prescription drugs. Tranquilizers don't end the pain; they only mask it. This may lead to further withdrawal, loneliness and even addiction. Grief work is done best when you are awake, not drugged into sleepiness.
- Seek the help of a counselor or clergy if grief is unresolved.
- Be determined to work through your grief.

## **BE GOOD TO YOURSELF**

- Keep a journal. It is a good way to understand what you are feeling and thinking. Hopefully, when you reread it later, you will see that you are getting better.
- Try to get adequate rest. Go to bed earlier. Avoid caffeine in coffee, tea and colas.
- Good nutrition is important.
- If Sundays, holidays, etc. are especially difficult times, schedule activities that you find particularly comforting into these time periods.
- Read recommended books on grief. It helps you to understand what you are going through. You may find suggestions for coping.
- Moderate exercise helps (walking, tennis, swimming, etc.). Don't feel guilty if you have a good time. Your loved one would want you to be happy. They would want you to live this life to the fullest and to the best of your ability.
- Do things a little differently, yet try not to make a lot of changes. This sounds like a contradiction, but it is not.
- Plan things to which you can look forward – a short trip, visit, lunch with a special friend. Start today to build memories for tomorrow.
- Find quotes or posters that are helpful to you and hang them where you can see them.
- Become involved in the needs of others. Helping others will build your self-confidence and enhance your self-worth. Join either a volunteer or support group: i.e. phoning; attending meetings; typing, collating newsletters. It does much to ease the pain.
- Be good to yourself: take a hot, relaxing bath; bask in the sun; take time for yourself (movie, theatre, dinner out, read a novel).
- Put balance in your life: pray; rest; work; read; relax.
- When you feel ready, aim at regaining a healthy, balanced life by broadening your interests. Take time for activities that can bring some purpose into your life. Think about doing something you've always wanted to do: taking a class; learning tennis; volunteer work; joining church groups; becoming involved in community projects or hobby clubs. Learn and do something new as well as rediscover old interests, activities and friends.
- Remember: take your life one moment, one hour, one day at a time.

## **REMEMBER – GRIEF TAKES TIME**

- Do not have unrealistic expectations of yourself. Grief takes TIME. It comes and goes.
- Remember, you will get better. Hold on to HOPE. Some days you just seem to exist, but better days will be back. You will develop a renewed sense of purpose gradually.