



GRIEF

Life After Loss



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Diane and I had been married for 35 years when the tragic accident happened. She was in a coma for 3 months and after a very hard discussion over artificial life, life made a decision of its own, and took my Diane away. I had lots of support from family and friends and did what I could to keep myself busy, but for more than a year, I felt as if I was empty, or torn in half, reduced to a surviving creature, living in survival mode. My emotions would go up and down, and even now, almost three years since her death and without any warning, tears come up and a deep emotional pain rises.”

Many of us can relate to this husband’s expressions.

Few things cause more stress or heartache more than the death of a spouse, a child, a relative, or a dear friend. The American Journal of Psychiatry states that “death is the most obviously permanent and extreme form of loss.”

“Life is what happens to us while we are making other plans.” Allen Saunders

Other losses can be anything from moving to a new location, major health changes, aging and loss of body control, a divorce or an empty

nest, to retirement, loss of future plans, loss of trust in a friend or even God. It is a broken heart.

Grief is a normal and natural reaction to these losses. When a loss happens, it is natural for shock to set in.

“If you’re going through hell, keep going.”
Winston Churchill

You may feel numb, not want to eat or get out of bed, or feel overwhelmed. You may feel that your life has stopped or frozen.

You may feel angry, depressed or even guilty. These are all normal.

Grief may also cause conflicted feelings, a feeling of relief and yet of pain. In the death of someone close we may feel relieved that the suffering is over but the absence hurts, thus it can cause confusion and frustration. Often we feel that we are expected by others to be sad or upset. The truth is there is no right or wrong way.



When confronted with a loss we might ask ourselves, “Why has this happened to me?”, “How much longer is this going to last?” “Will I ever be normal again?”, “Will I ever be happy again?” or “Will I ever see life with colors again?” When Naomi in the Bible lost her husband and two sons she changed her name to “Mara”, meaning “Bitter.” When Job in the Bible lost his children, and everything else, including his health, he wished he had never been born.

When we physically hurt ourselves we say “ouch!” Allen Klein says that “grieving is the body’s way of saying, “ouch” after a loss. It is telling us to stop what we are doing, take some time off, and admit that loss hurts.”¹

There are experts in the field of grief and loss that have talked about grief happening in stages (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) and even though some people can experience grief in those stages, especially with a terminal diagnosis, we need to acknowledge that each individual grieves in their own unique way. Much of it will depend on a person’s experiences, culture, personality, and nature of the loss. Don’t worry if you feel you are not grieving in “the correct way.”

“It’s never the end of the world. It’s already tomorrow in Australia.”
Charles M. Schulz

Grief has its own timetable, you cannot put a time on it. As well you cannot put a level of intensity on it. Some people can move on quickly, while for others it may take a long time.

Common Emotions and Challenges in Grief:

1. Feeling emotionally overwhelmed.

When confronted with a loss you may feel shock and disbelief. You might feel a lack of oxygen. Some people experience passing out, others may throw up,

Man has never made any material as resilient as the human spirit.

Bernard Williams

while others can lose their sense of time and surroundings.

You may experience crying spells. Crying helps remove tox-

ins and stress from our body. Give yourself permission to cry. Your moods may also change and vary easily. You also may not be able to sleep with so many thoughts running in your mind, and if you do sleep you may experience vivid dreams and memories.

With a loss you may feel overwhelmed with feelings of anxiety, anger, guilt, accusations and revenge. You may feel impotent in being unable to change events. It will be hard to concentrate and remember things.

2. Physical and health problems

You may develop mysterious health problems. Grief can cause many a somatic physical symptoms. Doctors may not be able to find physical issues but it is good to rule out any suspicions with a visit. Grieving from heartaches can also lower the immune system.



You can find yourself with a lack of appetite or desire to eat. Many may experience loss of weight and changed eating habits, as well as headaches and irritability.

3. Difficulty handling essential tasks

There are going to be changes and responsibilities in which you must adjust and learn to handle such as paying bills, sending documents, signing papers, banking, taxes, making decisions over businesses and belongings. These can very be difficult to handle in the midst of all your grief, when often the most common routines become big chores

“The world is round and the place which may seem like the end may also be only the beginning.”
Ivy Baker Priest

4. A desire to withdraw

A grieving person may feel irritable or awkward in the presence of others. It can be difficult to be around

people who complain about trivial things compared to yours. You can find it difficult to listen to somebody else's joys.

You can understand that life must go on, however, you don't want to put any effort into it. You probably have no desire, no patience to deal with it.

“A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles.”
Christopher Reeve

All these changes mentioned; emotional, physical, mental, spiritual, can depict a huge and difficult mountain to climb. You must remember, that the pain will be intense but knowing this in advance may help you to deal with

it. A newly bereaved person may find some comfort in knowing that all these terrible feelings are normal after the loss of a loved one.

Coping with Grief

We have always been taught how to accumulate things, but never how to grieve their loss. It will be a learning experience that takes time.

Part of dealing with grief is acknowledging that death is part of life. Ecclesiastes 3 says, “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven: A time to be born and a time to die.” In a perfect world no one would die, but in a world where nobody died, at least in the world as we know it, there would

not be enough space, resources, food, jobs, etc..
Would we even value life knowing that it went on forever?

Loss is necessary for us to grow, kind of like pruning. Throughout our life we need to learn how to let go. From that first love that dumped you, to your favorite car that wouldn't run anymore, to the job that changed your responsibilities, to aging and not being able to do what you could before. Death is that ultimate letting go.

“When someone we love dies, we get so busy mourning what died that we ignore what didn't.”
Ram Dass

It can help us to be stronger, wiser, and be more compassionate and more appreciative of every moment we have on this earth.

Here are some basic guidelines that have proved to be very practical and useful for many. Hopefully they may resonate with your own experiences.

1. Accept support from family and friends

As difficult as it can be for some, this is considered the most important factor in overcoming grief, the support from your friends and family. However, it is understandable that at times you will prefer to be left alone. If you kindly let people know how you feel and what you need or not, they will most likely respect that.

The most positive thing you can do is to express your feelings regarding company or advice. It is very easy to turn friends and family away when you probably

A real friend is the one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out.”

Walter Winchell

need them the most. Grievers need and should talk about their loss.

Remember, most people will not know how to help you. Perhaps you can offer some ways they can help, such as providing meals, just sitting with you, doing errands, helping with the paperwork, or just providing a gift.



Also remember that although people mean well, they may give misinformation from what they have learned in the past, such as “Life goes on,” “He is in a better place,” “She led a full life,” “You’ll find somebody else” or “God has a reason for this.” The truth is, people don’t know how to respond. You will have to ex-

press grace in these moments. They do not understand what you are going through, so forgive them “for they know not what they do.”

2. Reflect on forgiveness

Besides forgiving your well-meaning friends and family, you may need to forgive the deceased. You can forgive them even though they are not around.

And remember, it is not for them, it is for you. You can forgive them for leaving you or for something they have said or done that upset you. Understand that when our emotions run high

we often say things that we don't mean. You may need to forgive them for their inability to provide what you expected.

“Forgiveness is a funny thing. It warms the heart and cools the sting.”
William Arthur Ward

Perhaps you need to forgive the doctor who wasn't able to save their life or a friend or relative who wasn't there for you, or anyone who can't sympathize with your loss.

It is also important to ask for forgiveness from others. It is possible that you could have been curt with someone who was trying to help you, or forgetting to thank them for their support, or not communicating well your friends and family.

Perhaps you need to ask forgiveness from the deceased for not doing more to help them, or for not



being there or for something you said or did. You also need to forgive yourself for things you wanted to say to them but didn't or for any guilt you may have for them now. Remember it is not for them, but for you.

3. Be thoughtful about your own health

Keeping a balanced diet will help you manage the stress that comes from grief. When in doubt, check

“In some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning.” Viktor Fankl

with your doctor what is the best you can do to be in the best condition, but a balance amounts of fruits and vegetables, proteins and plenty of water will be a

great start.

Eat small amounts if your appetite is low. Again, check with your doctor about supplements, your weight, and health condition.

Make time for exercises or some physical activity that can help you to put aside the negative emotions for a bit. A nice brisk walk can provide you with time to reflect or time with friends.

Get plenty of sleep. It is one of the most important things you can do for your body and mind. Grief can drain you during the day, but don't let a restful night be taken away for too much thinking. A good sleep will help you to renew your strength, your hope, your appetite, and you're thinking too much.

4. Avoid self-destructive habits

We often try to replace our loss with something else. Some of your most enjoyable things can become bad habits when you are grieving.

Many people say to keep busy. However this can be a way to bury the pain. Work can become an escape to pain, and you can be absorbed by it without even thinking about it.

It can be damaging for you and your family

Your anxiety can lead you to misuse drugs or alcohol. The effects can numb your pain for a while but can have long term consequences. If you find yourself helpless, look for help, talk to a person you trust or look for professional help. The sooner the better. As mentioned, crying is the body's way of dealing

“When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer.”
Corrie ten Boom

with loss. Don't try to stifle them, but wallowing endlessly in those tears is not healthy either. Sometime we need to choose life.

5. Avoid making important decisions too soon

Suddenly you find yourself with a myriad of decisions big and small about many things: your home, funeral services, living situations, jobs, belongings, finances, debts, children, grandchildren, health and support, etc. With the help of a trusting friend or rela-

“Time heals all wounds, unless you pick at them.”
Shawn Alexander

tive, take care of what is most relevant and postpone any major decisions for later. For now, the most important business is your life, your inner being.

6. Engage in healthy activities

As soon you can, resume a normal routine. You will regain a sense a normalcy once you are able to have a routine for sleep, eat, work, rest, exercise, and more of your normal activities. Keeping yourself occupied with positive and uplifting activities will help you endure the pain, mitigate your emotions, and focus on others. But don't use busyness to mask your grief.

You might find it helpful to start something new as part of your routine, e.g. journaling, scrapbooking, being part of a book reading group, starting a class in something that you always wanted, taking your pet for walks, etc. Try new things, like a restaurant you've never been to. Walk or drive to a place you

have never been. Learn a new skill, get together with friends or make new ones. Investing your time in helping others will help you feel better. Step out of your comfort zone.

While at it, be thankful for anything you can, a coin on the sidewalk, fresh cookies, a new blouse, a rainbow, flowers in a garden, etc.

7. Give yourself permission to laugh

Research shows that if those who lost a loved one were able to laugh and smile during the first months after the loss, the better their mental health was over the next two years of bereavement. Allowing yourself to laugh gives you a break from the pain of loss, as well as exercises waist muscles. You can easily feel guilty for laughing when dealing with a life-changing situation, but it can be as healing as tears.

“When you have something like heart surgery, you appreciate the simple things, like breathing.”
Robin Williams

People say that time heals all things. You may feel like you have also lost your sense of humor, but in time you will find it again. Be open to laughter. Fred Allen a comedian said, “It is bad to suppress laughter. It goes back down and spreads to your hips.” If you can laugh, it gives hope that you will survive.

8. Create a special place

Many bereaved ones feel it is beneficial to do things that help keep alive the memory of the person who died. Remember a good-time story about them and tell it to others. Cook one of their favorite meals and share it with others. Go through your old photos and display a few of your favorites. When you feel ready for it, brainstorm about ways to celebrate and remember your loved one.

Some people can find it helpful to have a nice collection of pictures of special moments, or items with special meaning, while others can find it therapeutic to create a special garden to enjoy and meditate. Whatever works for you, do it with the intention of finding peace and relief when painful emotions arrive.

Rejoice in their life. Celebrate the good times you had together and celebrate how they enriched your life and world.



As time goes by, you will notice that times for breaks become longer than time for grieving. It will happen slowly but you will get there.

A New Beginning

The last process of grief is to move toward a new beginning.

After a loss we may often ask, “Why has this happened to me?” Usually there is no answer to that question or we may not know at the moment. Perhaps some better ques-

“I measure every grief I meet with narrow, probing, eyes. I wonder if it weighs like mine, or has an easier size.”

Emily Dickinson

tions to ourselves should be, “How will this help me live more fully knowing that my time is limited too?” “How will this help me contribute to the good of all people?” “How will this make me become a more loving person?”

Allen Klein writes, “Every time you lose something, you are presented with an opportunity to acquire something new. With each loss, there is a golden opportunity for a new beginning. You may not realize it right now, but your loss is part of your growth process. In fact, your loss can be seen as a gift. A gift of appreciating life more fully, a gift of cleansing through mourning, the gift of love.”²

This may a blessed time to reevaluate your priorities, to see something you did not see before, to see life from a new perspective, to find a new sense of purpose, and to support others who have been affected by loss.

Often when we suffer immeasurable losses, the only things we have left are humor and hope. Hope is the greatest gift we have. Hope can be defined as an optimistic state of mind based on the expectation of positive outcomes with respect to events and circumstances in one's life. If we can laugh, we can have hope. Hope is the only thing that will get us beyond where we are. Don't give up.

Notes

1. Allen Klein, *Embracing Life After Loss: A Gentle Guide for Growing Through Grief*, (Coral Gables: Mango Publishing, 2019).
2. Klein, Allen

