

...continued from page 6.

new activities and new relationships. Some people seek meaning in their loss and get involved in causes or projects that help others. Some people find a new compassion in themselves as a result of the pain they have suffered. They may become more sensitive to others, thus enabling richer relationships. Others find new strength and independence they never knew they had.

The Experience of Grief

Grieving people have two choices: they can avoid the pain and all the other emotions associated with their loss and continue on, hoping to forget. The other choice is to recognize grieving and seek healing and growth. Getting over a loss is slow, hard work. In order for growth to be possible, it is essential to allow oneself to feel all the emotions that arise, as painful as they may be, and to treat oneself with patience and kindness.

Feel the Pain

Give into it – even give it precedence over other emotions and activities, because grief is a pain that will get in the way later if it is ignored. Realize that grief has no timetable; it is cyclical, so expect the emotions to come and go for weeks, months or even years. While a show of strength is admirable, it does not serve the need to express sadness, even when it comes out at unexpected times and places.

Talk About Your Sorrow

Take the time to seek comfort from friends who will listen. Let them know you need to talk about your loss. People will understand, although

they may not know how to respond. If they change the subject, explain that you need to share your memories and express your sorrow.

Forgive Yourself

Forgive yourself for all the things you believe you should have said or done. Also forgive yourself for the anger and guilt and embarrassment you may have felt while grieving.

Eat Well and Exercise

Grief is exhausting. To sustain your energy, be sure to maintain a balanced diet. Exercise is also important in sustaining energy. Find a routine that suits you – perhaps walks or bike rides with friends, or in solitude.

Indulge Yourself

Take naps, read a good book, listen to your favorite music, get a manicure, go to a ball game, rent a movie. Do something that is frivolous, distracting and that you personally find comforting.

Prepare for Holidays and Anniversaries

Many people feel especially “blue” during these periods, and the anniversary date of the death can be especially painful. Even if you think you’ve progressed, these dates may bring back some of your painful emotions. Make arrangements to be with friends and family members with whom you are comfortable.

Get Help

Bereavement groups can help you recognize your feelings and put them in perspective. They can also help alleviate the feeling that you are alone. The experience of sharing with others who are in a similar situation

can be comforting and reassuring. Sometimes, new friendships grow through these groups – even a whole new social network that you did not have before. There are specialized groups for widowed persons, for parents who have lost a child, for victims of drunken drivers, etc. There are also groups that do not specialize. Check with your local hospice or other bereavement support groups for more information.

Take Active Steps to Create a New Life for Yourself

Give yourself as much time to grieve as you need. Once you find new energy, begin to look for interesting things to do. Take courses, donate time to a cause you support, meet new people, or even find a new job. It is often tempting to try to replace the person who has been lost. Whether through adoption, remarriage, or other means, this form of reconciliation often does not work.

Reprinted courtesy of National Hospice Organization (NHO), Arlington, Virginia, www.nho.org.

Grief Is Not...

Grief is not a mountain to be climbed, with the strong reaching the summit long before the weak.

Grief is not an athletic event, with stop watches timing our progress.

Grief is a walk through loss and pain with no competition and no time trials.