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10 STRATEGIES TO HELP YOU COPE WITH GRIEF AND LOSS

By Lucie Storrs

Grief is a personal experience, unique to each mourner and unique to each loss. Grief comes in waves, with times of peace and calm suddenly shattered by overpowering emotion. The following strategies provide a few suggestions to help you ride out the waves as you cope with your grief.

1. **Take time out.** In many ways, the experience of grief is similar to recovery from a serious illness; some days will be darker, and some will be brighter. Recognize your limits and separate the things that must be done from those that can wait. Don't worry about keeping up with your usual schedule. If you have to cancel or reschedule commitments, people will understand.
2. **Avoid making major decisions.** Grief can cloud your judgment and make it difficult to see beyond the pain you're feeling at the moment. Impulsive decisions-to move or change jobs, for example – can have far-reaching implications for which you may be unprepared. If you must make an important decision, discuss your options with someone you trust, such as a friend or financial advisor.
3. **Talk.** Painful feelings held inside are like an infection festering in a wound – they need to come out in order for you to heal. When friends ask how they can help, ask them to just be with you and listen. Tell them how important it is for you to be able to express what you're thinking and feeling. If you think you need more than the support of your friends, consider talking with a professional counselor.
4. **Express yourself creatively.** Writing is another excellent way to express yourself. Try keeping a journal or writing letters, whether you send them or not. When words won't come, artistic outlets like painting or doing crafts can help you to communicate what's in your heart and soul. Creative expression can bring clarity to the turmoil you feel and insight into feelings you weren't aware of.
5. **Honor your loved one's memory.** Preserve our memories in ways that are comforting and meaningful. Enlarge and frame a favorite photo of your loved one or compile a scrapbook of letters and mementos from the good times you shared. Make a quilt from his clothing or plant a tree or a bed of her favorite flowers to create a lasting tribute. Contributing time or money to your loved one's favorite cause or charity is also a noble way to honor his or her memory.
6. **Take care of your physical health.** Grief takes a physical toll as well as an emotional toll. Rest, exercise, and proper nutrition are essential to healing. Counteract a poor appetite by eating small amounts of healthy foods rather than large meals. If you have difficulty sleeping, try taking brief naps or just putting your feet up and relaxing whenever you can. And while you may not be motivated to exercise, just taking a brief walk now and then can lift your spirits and help you to sleep at night.
7. **Avoid using chemicals to numb your feelings.** A glass of wine can be good for the soul and help to settle jangled nerves but overdoing it can bring a host of new problems. Attempting to numb your feelings with alcohol, drugs or prescription medications will only prolong the pain. Eventually, one way or the other, you must come to terms with your grief.
8. **Have fun.** Grieving is difficult, but it doesn't mean you have to feel bad all the time; in fact, it's important to take a break from focusing on your grief. Have fun when you can, whether it's reading a good book, watching a movie, playing cards, or resuming other activities you enjoyed before your loss. Don't feel guilty about it.
9. **Plan ahead for special occasions.** Anniversaries and holidays can be stressful times when you've lost someone you love, and especially in the first year or two. Talk with family members about your concerns: this may be a good time to introduce new traditions to mark special occasions.
10. **Reach out.** In the beginning, your grief may be so intense that you just want to withdraw or isolate yourself. Soon, though, you'll be ready to ease back into social contact. Make a date with an old friend or invite a neighbor to lunch. Or try volunteering with your church or favorite charity – you'll make new social contacts while you help others, and you'll feel good about yourself.