

Walking Through Grief

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Most people recognize when they suffer the loss of a loved one, that owning and walking through their grief is in their best interests. They may not want to feel the overwhelming sadness and loss that characterizes grief, but still, most people know that the best way to recover from the loss and eventually get on with their lives is to feel and deal with the sadness when it comes up. Allowing yourself to cry, to be in pain, to reduce your expectations of self and to just be, give the griever an opportunity to heal. When you take the time to grieve you are less likely to get stuck.

It is not betrayal of your lost loved one to get through grief and to ultimately let them go. There is no time limit on grief. Well meaning people will try to give you advice on how they got through their own grief and what they think is "appropriate". They may try to save you, cheer you up, fix you, or otherwise take away your pain. They don't want you to hurt and they don't know what to do. Despite how annoying or frustrating this may be, try to give them credit for the intention of wanting to help.

You may not want to be around anyone. When your feelings are so close to the surface, a friend or relative can say anything and it will spark a deluge of emotion. It may feel like your feelings are out of control because they come to the surface so quickly and you cry when you don't want to. For most people, it is important to just let yourself cry. The intensity and frequency of your crying jags will keep getting smaller over time. Grief seems to come in waves. Although continuing for a long time, the waves will become further and further apart and after awhile you won't feel like you have been knocked off your feet by each wave of grief. You don't have to spend time with everyone that wants to spend time with you. It is, however, important that you do not isolate and withdraw.

You may feel lost, alone, abandoned, and sorrow for your loss. You may replay your regrets and ruminate on events that you feel guilty about, or you may second guess decisions that you made along the way. You may even be angry with yourself or others. It is important to not lost in despair. It feels like you will feel this way forever, but you won't. Although the loss of your loved one is overwhelming, you will recover.

Grief is not a disorder, a disease or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is

Recovery does not mean forgetting them. You will continue to remember them and love them. They are a part of you. You will however, be able to be happy once again sometime in the future. And to do so, will not be a betrayal to your lost loved one. You

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will miss them and think of them. You will think about the funny things that they did, the peculiar characteristics that were uniquely their own that once drove you completely crazy and will miss those. You will miss being able to share things with them.

Eventually you will be able to be grateful for the time that you had with them and the things that you shared. Although your identity as a part of that relationship is a piece of who you are, it was not and is not entirely who you are. Who you are will survive the loss of a loved one. Your identity as an individual person is still there. It evolved in part, from your relationship, but it remains after the loss of a loved one. It may take awhile to know that. As you take responsibility for your pain, grief, and your own life, you will be able to regain your sense of self and your purpose.



Grieving is like having your world turned upside down. In time, life will make sense again. Practice self-compassion. Work on loving yourself. Refocus and remember that you love other important people in your life as well. Give yourself permission to experience joy and laughter as they occur.

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What we have once enjoyed deeply we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes a part of us. - Helen Keller

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