

Bandages for Your Heart

Feel Better Now: 6 simple steps to grief relief

I have studied and offered healing techniques to those who grieve as a way to help ease the daily pain that is the companion of loss. Recently life created the unwelcome opportunity for me to witness the power of this process from the inside out. We all will suffer a loss during our lifetime. Each loss carries with it different circumstances, but there are still some strategies we can use to help us cope and heal.

Here are some steps to take that can help you navigate through grief and make it through the day:

1. **Rally the troops.** Call your family and friends and tell them what has happened. Their overwhelming outpouring of love and support will sustain you. Their continued calls, notes and e-mails, can help you to make it through a day, or at least the next five minutes of that day. Tell them what you need. Be willing to forgive those who make “helpful” comments they are sure will make you feel better. They seem to think that you are incapable of living your life without their input telling you what you should do and how you should feel. All that “shoulding” does nothing to ease the pain, but it must make them feel better to offer something they perceive as valuable advice. Accept their words as coming from a place of love and let them go.

2. **“How am I feeling at this moment?”** that is the question you need to stop and ask yourself from time to time throughout the day. It is necessary to get in touch with your feelings. Not with what your head tells you that you should be feeling, but what are you actually feeling. To do this, simply close your eyes, take a breath and ask the question. Then *feel* the answer. Sometimes it may surprise you to learn that you are feeling pretty good, even joyful at that particular moment. All is not heavy and painful every moment. You will still feel the loss, it is not erased from your consciousness that easily, but you might just realize that you can still touch into moments of joy.

When people grieve they tend to shut down. They stuff their feelings and wear a mask. There is a perception that others don’t want to witness our pain, so it is simpler to just act as if we are okay. This can be exhausting both physically and mentally. By getting back in touch with your feelings, it allows you to “check in” and understand where you are at.

3. **Breathe.** This is the simplest way to center yourself and reduce anxiety. There are numerous types of breathing techniques, but all of them consist of taking a breath from deep within your diaphragm – belly breathing. Stress breathing comes from using the top part of your lungs. When you stress breathe, you may feel your shoulders going up and down. Deep breathing fills the entire lung and expands the belly and brings in relaxation with each breath. Slow down and take a breath. Focus on it. Allow it to bring you into the present moment where relief can be found. Stop focusing on the memories of the past or the worries for the future, just for a moment concentrate only on your breath.

4. **Pick up a pen or boot up the computer and journal.** Let your thoughts and feelings flow freely. Don’t stop to edit or critique, just write. Write about things that happened that day. Write about your loss and your memories. Write about the pain you

are feeling. Write down your thoughts about the future. Unload your heavy burden by letting it out. Once you start your journal, go back from time to time and read older entries. They allow you to realize the progress you are making. Words are powerful and you can turn this energy into a healing agent through your journal.

5. Laugh daily. Reduce your stress, boost your immune system, get your brain working and balance your emotions through a ha-ha, a hee-hee, or even a ho-ho-ho. Watch something funny on TV or listen to your favorite comedian. Spend time with positive people. Even if you don't feel like laughing, laugh anyway. You can create the sound of laughter without reacting to a trigger. Laughter raises your vibration and creates a joyful attitude. It isn't possible to be laughing and anxious in the same moment, so giggle or guffaw your way to relief.

6. Find your passion and then participate in it. When you are doing something that you love, you find your pain decreasing. You may feel a poignant tug, especially if it something you used to do with your loved one, but you will still feel better just by immersing yourself in an activity you enjoy. When you are "in the zone" time stops and things flow. Perhaps you are not sure what will make you feel better or never discovered a passion. Even if you didn't take up a hobby or join a club, you can still find passion. Make a list of things you enjoy. This is your spiritual toolbox. What do you enjoy reading? Do you like taking a walk in nature or gardening? Maybe you enjoy spending time with your pets or your grandchildren? Try different activities until you find some that bring you joy.

Believe it or not, joy is still yours to have and these six simple activities can help you to connect with your inner happiness. No matter where you are at this moment, you can reach for a better feeling. Connect with others, feel your emotions, breathe, write, laugh and live. As James Russell Lowell said, "*Joy comes, grief goes, we know not how.*"

This article is offered as part of our funeral home's grief support program. The author, Nancy Weil, serves on the staff at the International Order of the Golden Rule (OGR) of which our funeral home is a proud member. She is a Certified Grief Management Specialist who has run grief support programs for over 13 years. You are invited to join our monthly telephone grief support group that Nancy facilitates. Please call our funeral home for more information.