



# After

Respecting Our Grief



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## After

*Where there is sorrow  
there is holy ground.*

*Oscar Wilde, De Profundis*

Your sorrow is sacred. It is important to respect yourself and your feelings now. A quieter time has come, and it may be hard to allow the quiet because so much has happened. You and your loved one have traveled a difficult road, and now you will journey down a different road. Not less difficult, but different.

This new road may take you where you would rather not go. If you don't feel ready, that's perfectly normal. It's hard to slow down, be quiet, and feel the pain, especially when you believe things will never be as they were before.

In many ways, this is true. Something momentous has happened and your life has been changed. This does not mean you will never be happy again, although it may seem that way now.

The purpose of this booklet is to share with you some wisdom learned from those who have experienced loss and to tell you some of the small, deliberate steps they have taken to feel better.

There is no correct way to grieve since each one of us is different. Our grief is like a fingerprint which is uniquely our own. We each have our own life experience, our own personality, and our own way of being in the world. In addition, all of our personal relationships with people are unique. Sometimes we are close and bonded and other times we are distant or estranged. Often, our experiences with people are a combination of both

good times and difficult ones. Because of these differences we will each grieve in our own way and in our own time.

Yet, there are some things we have in common with each other, and one of those things is our need to share our thoughts and feelings. At a time when we feel most like isolating ourselves, it is important to reach out to someone who will listen.

*I wonder why love is so often equated with joy when it is everything else as well. Devastation, balm, obsession, granting and receiving excessive value, and losing it again. It is recognition, often of what we are not but might be. It sears and it heals. It is beyond pity and above the law. It can seem like the truth.*

*Florida Scott-Maxwell, The Measure of My Days*

Sometimes it may help us understand our grief if we realize that to have great love can also mean great pain. Whatever

once gave great pleasure and fulfillment can often create great pain and emptiness when lost. Many grieving people have described their physical state as “having an empty hole in their chest with a cold wind blowing through.” When asked whether they would have missed the joy to avoid the pain, most say they would not have missed the love, even knowing the cost.

It may be hard to believe, but you will feel better.

*We trust that beyond the absence, there is a presence. That beyond the pain, there can be healing. That beyond the hurting, there may be forgiveness. That beyond the silence, there may be the Word. That beyond the Word, there may be Understanding. That through Understanding there is love.*

*Gates of Prayer*

## Natural Grief Responses

Grieving the loss of a loved one is painful, and at times, can seem overwhelming. Many of us doubt ourselves at a time like this and we can wonder if we are “normal.” Sometimes it can be helpful to know some of the experiences common to other people. The National Hospice Organization has compiled a list of natural grief responses, and we would like to share this list with you:

- Feeling emotionally numb and having difficulty believing the death occurred
- Feeling tightness in your throat or heaviness in your chest or pit of your stomach
- Having change in appetite, either eating more or less than usual
- Having desire to smoke, drink, or use drugs in greater amounts than before
- Feeling restless and looking for activity
- Finding it difficult to concentrate and having trouble completing tasks
- Having difficulty sleeping, waking early, sleeping more or less than usual, dreaming of your loved one, and/or sometimes having nightmares
- Being overly concerned with your health, even developing symptoms similar to those of your loved one (if you have not had a check-up by your doctor recently, it would be a good idea to have one now)
- Feeling exhausted and lacking energy
- Feeling low at times of birthdays, holidays, and special occasions

- Feeling preoccupied with financial concerns
  - Spending money on things not usually purchased as a way to avoid pain
  - Telling and retelling things about your loved one and the experience of his or her illness and death
  - Talking things over with the deceased person
  - Feeling mood changes over the slightest things
  - Feeling guilty for what was said or not said, or for not having done enough for your loved one
  - Being irritated with the wrong person, wrong situation, or at the world
- Feeling angry with your loved one for leaving you, angry at their disease, or angry with God
  - Having difficulty making decisions on your own
  - Forgetfulness
  - Sensing your loved one's presence, believing you hear his or her voice, or expecting him or her to return
  - Experiencing an intense preoccupation with the life or death of your loved one
  - Assuming mannerisms or traits of your loved one
  - Feeling as though life has no meaning
  - Crying at unexpected times

- Not wanting to be with people or having difficulty initiating contact
- Feeling self-pity and not feeling needed
- Another response can be relief. You may feel a sense of relief after the death, especially if your loved one's illness was prolonged or you were fatigued as a caregiver

These are natural grief responses. No one can tell you how you should be feeling or how long you will feel that way. If you begin to think you are stuck and want some relief, there are small steps you can take when you are ready. Crying and expressing your feelings and emotions to others helps.

Often it is hard to live through a grief experience and then adjust to a new life afterwards. Grievers have a tendency to

isolate. Being with other people living through a similar situation can provide the encouragement you need. Deep in grief, one person may say they have no hope. Another person who has faced sorrow may say, "I remember feeling that way, and I feel more hopeful now."

*Hope is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul,  
And sings the tune without the words,  
And never stops at all.*

*Emily Dickinson*

## Feelings When Coping with Life Changes, Grief, and Loss

A broad range of feelings are expected during the process of grieving. Grief and the feelings associated with it vary from person to person depending on a number of factors. Some of these factors include:

The personal level of importance the loss had to you, your personal relationship with the loss, your past experiences in dealing with loss and change, your health, your support system, your personality, your coping skills, your cultural and religious background, and your family history. No one has the same feelings or range of feelings when it comes to loss and change. It is normal to:

- Feel sadness and longing for the person, situation, or item you have lost
- Cry at times you do not expect
- Experience fear, worry, frustration, exhaustion, anger, regret, confusion, anxiety, despair, or a host of other feelings
- Feel relieved, peaceful, contented, or spiritual

- Feel loneliness, uneasiness, helplessness, hopelessness, or depression
- Want to spend time alone
- Have a desire to get away or go on vacation
- Feel disorganized, lost, or unsure of yourself
- Be a bit on edge or react unusually strongly to seemingly minor events
- Be overly sensitive when dealing with other people
- Have physical ailments or symptoms

It is important to recognize your feelings and accept them. There is no right or wrong way to feel, other than you need to be honest with yourself and with others. Grief expressed is grief diminished, so it is important that you express yourself as you



truly feel. By doing so, you will be able to work through your feelings and hasten the process toward healing.

## Some Things That Help

In addition to talking with family and friends, writing in a journal is something many people find helpful in coping with strong emotions, especially during periods of anger and depression. Looking back over the things you have written can often bring hope for the future.

During the time after an important loss, we can help ourselves by following a few guidelines:

- Eat three well-balanced meals a day
- Get adequate rest
- Engage in recreational activities on a regular basis (at least once a week)



- Seek out friends who are uplifting
- Spend time with understanding people
- Attend your own spiritual services
- Practice relaxation techniques or meditation

If you still feel as though you need additional help or resources, contact your local Crossroads Hospice Bereavement Coordinator. They can meet with you, talk on the phone, provide educational

materials, offer grief support groups, and can share referral resources for local counselors, therapists, and psychologists.

**888-658-4888** or **www.crhcf.org**

*Hope is the physician for every misery.*

*Irish Proverb*

## The Six Needs of Mourning

“Grieving” is the thoughts and feelings we have inside after we have experienced a loss. “Mourning” is the outward expression of grief.

Dr. Alan Wolfelt, of the Center for Loss and Transition in Colorado, has defined six needs of mourning. We would like to share these with you.

### 1. Acknowledging the Reality of Loss

This acknowledgement may occur over weeks or months or even later. Without this acknowledgement, we may think we have faced the reality that someone we love has died, yet find our acknowledgement has been pushed aside. Talking about our loss will help us work on this need.

### 2. Experiencing the Pain of the Loss

Most of us avoid pain when we can, so the task of letting ourselves feel the pain can be difficult. Sometimes we have to experience the pain of the loss a little at a time. Talking with someone who will simply listen helps us with this task.

### 3. Remembering the Person Who Died

If we want to continue to display photos and keep possessions of our loved one, this should be allowed. We do not need to let well-meaning friends or family members take these valuable belongings away in an attempt to save us from the pain. The person who died will continue to live on in our memories. In addition to keeping photos and other belongings, we can write down descriptions of our loved one, list their traits, describe their personality, and keep our list with other remembrances.

### 4. Developing A New Self-Identity

In some ways, who we are as a person is related to our relationships — wife, husband, mother, father, sister, brother, daughter, son, or friend. This may change

when a loved one dies. We become a widow, a bereaved parent, sister, or brother, or a bereaved child. Sometimes when working on this new self-identity, we find surprising positive changes. We can accept this without guilt.

One method of beginning to develop a new identity is to write down your thoughts:

Before, I used to be \_\_\_\_\_.

Now that \_\_\_\_\_

died, I am \_\_\_\_\_.

This makes me feel \_\_\_\_\_.

Keep writing about the significance of these changes in your life.

### 5. Searching for Meaning

Most of us ask the question “Why?” when someone important to us dies. We sometimes find ourselves questioning

our spiritual beliefs or life at such a time. It can be helpful to write down these “why” questions and talk them over with a minister, a counselor, or a friend who can listen without judging.

## 6. Receiving Ongoing Support from Others

Sometimes our friends and family members don't quite know how to provide the support we need. It is important that we tell our friends and family what we need from them. This may not be an easy thing to do since our society places such value upon independence and privacy. Yet, our need for support is real, and there are people in our lives who will be there for us if they know we need them.

### Suggestion

Note the days you know will be difficult on a calendar (birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, and other special days) and call a friend a day or two ahead of time and make plans to spend part of that day together.

*Start by doing what's necessary, then what's possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible.*

*Francis of Assisi*

## The Grief Recovery Handbook

Grief is the normal and natural reaction to loss of any kind. Yet, many of us believe we should be strong and grieve alone in an attempt to avoid making others uncomfortable. Therefore, we

tend to keep our feelings of sadness, anger, pain, regret, relief or other feelings to ourselves.

Are you expressing your feelings and emotions or keeping your grief inside?

In their book ***The Grief Recovery Handbook***, John James and Russell Friedman suggest that unresolved grief is almost always about undelivered communications of an emotional nature (unexpressed feelings and emotions). You might find yourself thinking about how you wish some things with your loved one had been different, better, or more in your relationship. You may also find yourself thinking about future dreams or expectations that never came to fruition.

When thinking about your wishes for things to have been different, better or more, you may find yourself considering

resentments (things you wish your loved one had said or hadn't said to you or things you wished your loved one had done or hadn't done to you). You may also touch on regrets (things you wish you had said or hadn't said to your loved one or things you wish you had done or hadn't done to your loved one).

Thinking about resentments and regrets brings on thoughts about things you wish you could communicate to your loved one. ***The Grief Recovery Handbook*** identifies them as apologies, forgiveness, and significant emotional statements.

To help you identify and communicate these unsaid and undone things, The Crossroads Hospice Charitable Foundation offers a 10–12 week **Grief Recovery Method® Outreach Program** that will guide you through the steps to help resolve your loss issues and move beyond

your grief to richer quality of life. You can contact the **Certified Grief Recovery Specialist®** at your local Crossroads Hospice office to learn more about this program and to sign up for the next group.

**888-658-4888** or **www.crhcf.org**

*The one who removes a mountain begins by carrying away small stones.*

*Chinese Proverb*

## Help for the Holidays

*This time, like all times, is a very good time if we but know what to do with it.*

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

During the holidays or special occasions, our thoughts often turn to the significant people no longer in our lives. This often leaves us with feelings of emptiness and longing. We may approach holidays and other special occasions with

a sense of dread because of the feelings of sadness these days evoke.

### Personal Remembrance

Throughout time, people everywhere have used ceremony to help with acceptance. In our culture, we use the funeral ceremony to honor the deceased while comforting the living. Long after the funeral, though, many of us find the need for continued help to face Memorial Day, Christmas, and other holidays, anniversaries, birthdays, and significant occasions that bring back the feelings of grief. Personal ceremonies can be useful at these times.

We enjoy most meaningful relationships on four levels: physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. When we are separated from a loved one by death, the physical aspect is taken away.

We keep the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual ties to the person. We often think of the person.

We continue to feel love and the spiritual connection. Personal rites allow us to demonstrate our love and respect for each of these remaining aspects of our relationship. While we gather the items needed and perform the observance, we remember the person with feelings and spiritual connection. We release the energy and stress of the hurt we may have been holding.

Personal ceremony does not need to be elaborate. It only needs to feel right to the person performing it. Some examples of acts of remembrance others have found helpful are:

- Writing a message on a helium balloon and releasing it in a special place
- Writing a letter to the person no longer present
- Planting a tree in honor of a loved one
- Lighting a candle, saying a prayer, offering a toast, putting out a picture, or having a particular kind of food your loved one liked on a special occasion
- Telling stories about your loved one

Whatever you decide to do, it is important to celebrate the relationship in a meaningful way by taking your time, honoring your loved one, and closing the ceremony by thinking about how you have been touched by this person.

Observances performed in private are helpful to us, and observances done with others have the added spiritual quality of being shared. When grief is shared, healing is possible.



None of us choose grief, yet all of us will be touched by grief at some time in our lives. We can, however, choose how we cope with it. We can ignore grief, or we can honor it and use it as a way to

grow in spirit. Ceremony in celebration of our loving relationships helps give our personal grief respectful attention.

*I walked a mile with Pleasure,  
She chattered all the way,  
But left me none the wiser  
For all she had to say.  
I walked a mile with Sorrow,  
And ne'er a word said she.  
But oh, the things I learned from her  
When Sorrow walked with me.*

*Robert Browning*

May your memories provide comfort and warmth as you travel on your personal journey. May you find hope and be filled with peace and love.