

The Waves of Grief

The concept of the “waves” of grief may be helpful to you as you begin to make sense of your reactions following the death of your loved one. Often this time may seem to lack purpose and direction. With the goals of healing and rediscovering meaning in life, the following ideas may be useful to you.

Coming to terms with the reality of your loss. The initial period after a death is often characterized by a sense of shock and disbelief. When the shock of the death begins to lift, you may be confronted with moments of incredible pain. While this pain is very difficult, it can lead you to a more complete realization of the reality of this loss. The use of clear language about death may also help bring this reality into focus. Talking about the events before the death, the time of the death and the funeral/memorial, and telling stories about your loved one, are all part of this work.

Experiencing the pain of your loss. The saying “the only way out is through” is true of grief. The more you allow yourself to go through the myriad of emotions, the more you will move toward healing. Be gentle with yourself, allow yourself to cry, laugh, rest when you can, get regular exercise, eat nourishing food, and care for your spiritual self. And remember to BREATHE deeply as much as possible. These self-care activities are important now, and will remain important in the months ahead. Continuing to seek the support of understanding people, while caring for yourself on all levels, can help you begin to realize that you can recover the coping skills necessary to move forward in your life.

Learning what it means to live without your loved one. Gradually you will find yourself learning to adjust to a world in which your loved one is no longer living. The work ahead of you is to discover the place your loved one filled in your life, and to consider what tasks and roles may need to be assumed by you, or by others, and what changes may need to occur. Of course, some aspects of his/her place in your life will never be assumed by another. This is also the time to look at what it means to change your relationship with your loved one from a relationship of the present to a relationship of memory—in memory, he/she is *always* with you.

Beginning to develop a new identity, a new sense of yourself. Here is where you may begin to discover what really matters and has meaning for you. For many, this is a time of reprioritizing life activities, developing a deeper spirituality, and appreciating the preciousness of life.

This journey has no timetable. You may experience any of these waves in your own unique way, and maybe at recurrent or concurrent times. Anniversaries or future losses are often times when people feel they are going through the waves again. Care lovingly, gently and patiently for yourself. Remember to give yourself credit for each small step you take. You are journeying toward healing.