

# Living Through Grief

## **After the First Year**

This is the last publication in the Grief Information Series. This publication will spotlight accomplishments you may have experienced but did not recognize during the first year, make suggestions for the next year, and highlight warning signs of severe depression. Two exercises addressing *The Future* are also included.

## **First Year Successes**

Although you may feel you have accomplished very little over the last year, many small victories may have gone unnoticed.

You had patience to accept and live through the initial shock and disbelief of your loss

You demonstrated willpower when you got up each morning to face yet another day without your loved one.

You may be adjusting to doing some of the things your loved one did in the past or may be learning new skills that help you adjust to your loss.

You showed courage when you worked on your grief, feeling the pain of your loss.

And although you will never “get over” your loss, you have been slowly weaving this loss into your life and moving forward.

## **After the First Year....**

### **Where Do You Go From Here?**

The first Year of grief is painful and exhausting. You have experienced many "firsts" without your loved one: birthdays, holidays, and other special events. No doubt you found the days leading up to and the day of these events difficult.

Although you may feel a little better, you may not feel nearly as healed as you would like. It helps to understand that for many, the first year following the death feels like a *tearing down* of life, and the second year feels like *rebuilding* of life. Some of the suggestions below may help you as you continue to weave your loss into your new life:

- Setting expectations that are too high can cause frustration and disappointment. Be kind to yourself by setting reasonable goals.
- A different level of reality has probably hit you. Although you no longer deny the death of your loved one, you realize how it is going to affect you for the rest of your life. Adjust at your own pace.
- Other situations in your life may be adding to your burden (trouble with work, family members or friends). Realize this happens to many grieving people and that it can make your grief more difficult.
- You may or may not cry often, but when you do, realize it is helpful. Do not fight the tears.
- Check often to make sure you have balance in your life-work, fun, (including exercise, hobbies, reading, etc.) and rest.
- Pick out your most pressing concerns and think of all the possible solutions. Choose one solution at a time and try it.

Do not be surprised if after months or years you suddenly become discouraged or depressed over the loss of your loved one. You think, "I should be over this" or "Something is wrong with me". To be healed does not mean you will never feel any of your pain again. You will. Some of your brokenness is healed, but other areas continue to need care.

### **REMEMBER:**

Healing is a slow process. Try to go at your own pace as you continue to face your grief.

## **Grief and Depression**

It is important to be aware that you can become "stuck" in your grief because of constant depression. Below is a simple test to help you decide whether your sadness is severe enough that you might benefit from counseling.

**Instructions: Check the boxes below that apply to you.**

If you are suffering from severe depression, you will have at least one of the two following symptoms **every day** for two weeks or more.

A deep sense of sadness or unhappiness

A lack of Interest in things you used to enjoy, such as hobbies or friends

**AND**

You will also have at least four of the following symptoms **every day** for two weeks or more.

Weight gain or weight loss

Trouble remembering, thinking or making decisions

Fatigue or lack of energy

Sleeping too little or too much

Feelings of guilt or worthlessness

Restlessness or decreased activity

Thoughts of death or suicide; attempted suicide

**If you checked the last box, you should seek help now, no matter how many boxes you checked.**

## The Future

These brief exercises can be helpful as you move forward with your grief.

Things I can continue doing to help myself heal:

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New Things I can begin doing to help myself heal:

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**My moment of pain remain; however they are different than before.**

Hope is present when: You can appreciate life and all it has to offer you. You are able to experience a newness and insight about others. You seem more aware of others' pain and hurt. You can take risks in reaching out to others. You are more comfortable with you are. You have a greater appreciation for this moment in time, knowing it could change tomorrow. You know that life is worthwhile and full of promise. You know that the future depends upon the choices you make. You are able to laugh at yourself and with others.

**REMEMBER**

**The harshness of winter is gone and spring brings the hope of new life.**

Hopes I have for the future:

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