



COPING with GRIEF

Relationship expert Jan Day shares her advice on how to deal with loss

The death of a loved one naturally causes immense grief. In addition, every time we suffer a loss, it brings the pain of past loss back to the surface – whether that is from death, disappearance, separation or abandonment.

Therefore, dealing with this kind of situation can feel like an overwhelming emotional challenge.

Loss calls on us to open up to feelings of grief and sadness that we may not have experienced before. While we need to find expression for our feelings, it's also important to know that we don't have to do it all at once. Each person processes grief differently, so whatever is happening for you, be gentle with yourself and know that you are finding your way.

SEEK SUPPORT

You may feel shocked at your own reaction to grief, often being numb for some time or seemingly feeling nothing until the reality of your new situation unfolds itself. As a

bereaved parent you probably need to hold a lot together for your children and yet you still need to grieve. You may be facing additional challenges involving aspects such as finances or childcare. Try to take things slowly one step at a time and seek support. Many friends will be willing to help but often don't know what is needed and

are afraid of getting it wrong. Let people know what you need and be clear about the help you do and don't require. Your clarity will enable others to help you so set clear boundaries.

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”

the moments of times you shared. You can do something similar by making a memorial box of treasures with objects, clothing and pictures. Place it somewhere special and make time to just be there, holding and smelling and touching each item in the box, allowing your memories and feelings to flow easily. You may find it helpful to write letters to the one you're grieving for, or write about how you are feeling and coping in a journal. Be willing to step out of the ordinary, everyday way of being. Anne Geraghty channelled a beautiful piece of music from her musician son after his sudden death, having never written music before! She also wrote a wonderful book (*Death, the Last God*) about her healing journey in the year after his death.

Whatever you choose, imagine that you are pouring all the love that you gave your beloved towards yourself, as a way of honouring them and celebrating what you shared. Most importantly, trust what feels right for you however different it may be to what you or people around you expect.

REGAIN CONTROL

Losing a loved one feels like such a loss of control that for some people, finding a way to regain this is important. Often this means being willing to speak up to well-meaning friends or family to let them know that their choices are not necessarily yours. Understand that friends are trying to be helpful, acknowledge that, and then say, "Thank you, I really appreciate that but I'd rather do it this way".

Don't feel pressurised to do anything quickly. You may want to and you don't have to. Find your way. There is no right way. Friends may offer to help you clear clothing or do other jobs before it's the right time for you. Listen to what you need. Go as slow or as fast as feels best for you.

TALK TO OTHERS

Talking can help open the doors to sorrow and loss – as long as you are talking to someone who can be with you in your sadness. Unfortunately, sorrow and grief is often glossed over in our culture so you may find that even close friends are unequipped to be with you at this time. Reach out and welcome whoever comes. Often the people who can be with you are people who have suffered loss themselves and they may not be the ones you expect.

MOVE THROUGH YOUR EMOTIONS

There are many activities that you may want to consider that will both help you to access and move through your emotions and meet people at the same time. Singing is uplifting and a wonderful way to do this in my opinion, and many local singing groups are organised especially for this purpose. Dance such as 5-Rhythms or trance dance allows you to literally move through your feelings, integrating them as you dance. Expressive art classes are another doorway to your emotions, while massage and conscious touch workshops are gentle ways to open your body up to the situation. You also try letting your friends simply hold you. Because our emotions are so tightly held in the body, when we are physically touched all our feelings are touched and are able to flow as energy in our body.

Specialised bereavement counsellors or therapists can be very helpful, especially at times when it seems overwhelming. Mindfulness is also a well-trodden path to dealing with sorrow and mindfulness groups exist in most towns now.

Whatever you choose, find the way that works for you to release and express your emotional stress. If you don't, you are more vulnerable to falling into depression or numbing yourself to the pain through alcohol or other vices.

OPENING TO LOVE AGAIN

The death of a partner leaves us knowing that life will never be the same again, but that doesn't mean life won't continue. You may find yourself opening in love sooner than you expected or even sooner than you think is reasonable. Be kind to yourself, allow yourself new friendships and go as slowly as you need to while you are in emotional turmoil. Be honest with anyone who comes close and stay open to what feels right for you. There is no set timetable for moving on to create new friendships and partnerships. Your partner would more likely wish you happiness than guilt.

Opening to befriend the heartache and pain of loss creates the opening for new love. So befriend your tears and sadness and let your heart break open.

Jan Day is a relationship expert. For more information visit janday.com

BEFRIEND YOUR OWN SORROW

Perhaps the biggest step in overcoming grief and loss is to befriend your own sadness. Most of us have been taught to shy away from our tears – we aren't comfortable being seen crying and we aren't comfortable simply letting our tears flow. If we face our grief, it gradually loses its impact and our life can move on, leaving the jewels of memories in our heart and mind.

For many people who have been bereaved, maintaining a sense of connection with their loved one is helpful. It doesn't matter whether you do this through an energetic love connection or whether you believe in real psychic connection. What matters is to honour your love and the bond with the one you have lost.

You could do this simply by having a picture of them and talking to it as if they are there. Alternatively close your eyes and bring them into your thoughts. Making a scrapbook of your life together with photographs, drawings and writing can help you to remember, treasure and celebrate all