

Ways to Heal Through Grief

There is no shortcut, but there are steps that move the process of attaining a “new normal”.

Center for Hospice in Mishawaka has free grief counseling to anyone, even if their program hasn't been used before. As part of qualifying for State funding, they make these services available to the public. Not all of these suggestions work for someone. The idea is to pick which ones help you the most. Each person may find some work for them better depending on their personality and place in the family.

Grief is personal and it can bring up grief from the past as well.

1. **Move past the death date** and go back to celebrating the person's birthday. Celebrate their life. In lieu of a physical gift, make a meaningful donation to honor them. Example, if they were into baseball, buy a bunch of baseball tickets and give them to the kids at a homeless shelter to have fun and get a break from their life circumstances.
2. **Remember their whole life.** Create a scrapbook or series of scrapbooks with pictures and memories of the best things about the person. This can be a family activity or a personal one. Include happy and funny things. Laugh over it, cry over it, just keep going until it is finished.
3. **Create a Daily Remembrance** – At first it seems hard to even get through to the next minute, then the day, then the week, then the year. This is a way of starting small. Ideas:
 - * Light a candle at the same time each day and talk to the person.
Perhaps say a prayer for their soul. Tell them how your day went if it is at the end of the day.
 - * Journal in general or write them a letter/note each day
 - * Spend time meditating – “Calm” is an app that can help
 - * Listen to their favorite song each day or your favorite songThe point of this is to honor them and give yourself permission to go on with the rest of your day.
4. **Move grief out of the body** – Sadness can feel like a heavy weight in the body. Different emotions create different chemicals in the body. There can also be a lack of brain chemicals such as serotonin and dopamine. Physically moving the body helps alter the sadness back to a normal state. Pick an activity that works for you such as swimming, walking, yoga/Pilates, If you like a sport like tennis or golf, be sure to schedule it weekly. Make an appointment with yourself to go back to joy. Massages can also be helpful.
5. **Feeling Joy is okay** – Read this as many times as you need to. Going back to joy doesn't mean you loved the person any less. *We are meant to live our lives, not get stuck in misery.* If you have other people in your life such as kids or parents that you care for, it is even more important to move forward. It will help them get back to a normal life as well.
6. **Create a Legacy** – Particularly in the Jewish faith, huge amounts of money are given to charity and scholarships so that person's death will live on by benefitting the living. *“May their memory be a blessing.”* If they don't donate money, they donate time through volunteering. In Japanese culture it is important to do good deeds to “honor the ancestors”. If the person had a particular interest, that may be the place to start. We often see, “In lieu of flowers we ask that you donate to _____.”
7. **Give yourself grace** – Be as kind to yourself as you would be a good friend. The voice inside your head needs to be kind. If you are blaming yourself that “if only I had done something differently” is part of the grief, you need to forgive yourself. *We all deserve grace.* Give yourself that grace to move on and live a life of purpose and joy.

8. **Find a new hobby** – Hobbies give us personal joy and express our unique talents. Create something new and fresh to do or take classes and elevate a talent you already have. This is where art therapy and music therapy have been shown to help. The act of creating something will move the brain forward to release the old and make room for the new. Gardening is another great hobby since it shows us life is renewed with new growth. A flower garden can bring new color into your life. Maybe even do the hobby with others in the family.
9. **Volunteer** – Giving to others moves us away from getting stuck on ourselves and brings renewed purpose into our lives. Giving to others sparks joy and this can reignite the joy you think is gone forever.
10. **Go to a concert** – Live music gives us a break from thinking. The whole purpose is to enjoy the moment. Get lost in the music you enjoy and bring back fun memories.
11. **Annual Remembrance** – Often there is a local group that will have an annual remembrance for parents who have lost children, people who have lost veterans or other special groups. Sharing grief in a group can help dissipate personal grief.
12. **Add a new family member** – Pets are incredibly healing. They can comfort and remind us to live in the moment. Get a pet from a shelter. You will be giving life to another being and a renewed life for yourself. Be sure to get a pet with a loving disposition since you want this as a comfort/companion animal. Explain that when you go to look for an animal. A dog can give you a reason to get out and take a walk every day and that can be a very healing time. If you are a cat person, then pick one that will cuddle with you. Don't feel you have to adopt one on the first visit to the shelter. Go back a few times or until you find one that matches you. This is a 24/7 companion, so it needs to be a good fit with you and your family.

Time and self-care are the only way to get to the other side of grief. In some cases, it never totally goes away, but it does become more manageable. Give yourself permission to cry, sob and be angry. It's all okay. It's part of being human and having had a loving relationship with someone else. Focus on the good times you shared with this person. It's even okay to keep talking with them.

I hope you find something on this list that brings you and your family comfort and healing.

Sue Kesim