

After the First Year...Then What

For many people, the first year of bereavement brings a wide range of intense reactions. As you approach the anniversary of the death, you may not feel as “healed” as you expected to be. It is important to remember that grief does not suddenly disappear; it is a slow process of healing. It helps to have realistic expectations for yourself, to continue working through your pain and to hold on to hope.

Grief is different for everyone, so don't compare; like fingerprints and snowflakes, no two are alike.

If the death was unexpected, the second year may be as difficult as the first.

Other events in your life may be adding to your stress.

Set realistic goals for the future.

Emotions

- You may still find that feelings of anger or guilt are still present. If so, don't push them down or try to ignore them; recognize and work on them.
- Depression may re-enter your life or appear for the first time. You will slide into the 'pit' more than once. Remember, this is part of the grief process and *you will get better*.
- “Time will heal” is a common saying. Time does soften the hurt, but mainly it's what you do with the time that makes the difference.
- You may still cry a little or a lot; it is therapeutic, so don't fight it. “Cry when you have to, laugh when you can”. (J.G. Jones, Time Out for Grief)

Body

- Physical symptoms such as stomach disorders and chest pains may appear. Have regular check-ups.
- Insufficient sleep can be a problem for grieving people. Try giving up caffeine and alcohol. Physical exercise can also help.
- It is difficult to maintain a balance in your life: check on the amount of energy you put into both your responsibilities and your nourishment.

Thoughts

- You may still think you are “going crazy” or that your grief is out of control. It is important to realize grief work takes more time than you think it should. Be patient.
- **Why??** If the why is bothering you, ask it again and again. You may never know why, but asking the question is important.

Social

- Don't expect too much of your family they, too, have their hands full of grief.
- People may say "shape up...you should be over it by now...get on with your life...". You may feel abandoned by friends and even family. Talk to someone who understands.
- Loneliness may engulf you as you look ahead to life without the person who has died. When you're ready, find new friends or reconnect with old ones, find worthwhile projects or work.

Getting Help

Many of you have learned to be independent, "I'm going to handle this grief myself". While you may find it difficult to reach out and ask for help, it can make a big difference. If your previous style of grieving has not been helpful, now may be the time to try a different approach: eg. Join a support group, find telephone friends, read about grief, develop new coping skills, do your grief work.

Remember, hold onto hope.

