

Grief Tips

Help For Those Who Mourn

Following are some suggestions for people who are mourning the death of a loved one. Different kinds of losses call for different responses, so not all of these ideas will suit everyone. Likewise, no two people grieve alike—what works for one may not work for another. Treat this list for what it is: a gathering of assorted ideas that various people have tried with success. Perhaps what helped them through their grief will help you. And perhaps you are developing your own ideas that will one day assist others.

1. Talk regularly with a friend.

Talking regularly about what you think and feel is one of the best things you can do for yourself. It helps relieve some of the pressure you may feel, it gives you a sense of perspective, and it keeps you in touch with others.

2. Walk.

Go for walks outside every day if you can. Don't overdo it, but walk briskly enough that it feels invigorating. Sometimes try walking slowly enough so you can look carefully at whatever you want to see. Observe what nature has to offer you, what it can teach you.

3. Carry or wear a linking object.

Carry something in your pocket or purse that reminds you of the one who died—a keepsake they gave you perhaps, or a small object they once carried or used, or a memento you have selected for this purpose. Whenever you want, reach for or gaze upon this object and remember what it signifies.

4. Visit the grave.

Not all people prefer to do this. But if it feels right to you, then do so. Don't let others convince you this is a morbid thing to do. Spend whatever time feels right there. Stand or sit in the quietness and do what comes naturally: be silent or talk, breathe deeply or cry, recollect or pray.

5. Create a memory book.

Compile photographs that were taken through the years which document your loved one's life. Arrange them into some sort of order so they tell a story. Add other elements if you want: diplomas, newspaper clippings, awards, honors, accomplishments. Reminisce as you do so.

6. Recall your dreams.

Your dreams often have important things to say about your feelings and about your relationship with the one who died. Your dreams may be scary or sad, especially early on. They may seem weird or crazy to you. You may find that your loved one appears in your dreams in various ways. Accept your dreams and see what you can learn from them.

7. Tell people what helps you and what doesn't.

People around you may not understand what you need. So tell them. If hearing your loved one's name spoken aloud by others feels good, say so. If you need more time alone, or assistance with chores you're unable to do, or an occasional hug, be honest. People can't read your mind, so you'll have to speak it.

8. Write things down.

Most people who are grieving become more forgetful than usual. So help yourself remember what you want by keeping track of it on paper or with whatever system works best for you. This may include writing down things you want to preserve about the person who has died.

9. Ask for a copy of the memorial service.

If the funeral liturgy or memorial service held special meaning for you because of what was spoken or read, ask for the words. Whoever participated in that ritual will feel gratified that what they prepared was appreciated. Turn to these words whenever you want.

10. Plant something living as a memorial.

Plant a flower, a bush, or a tree in memory of the one who died. Or plant several things. Do this ceremonially if you wish, perhaps with others present, perhaps not. If you do this where you live, you can watch it grow and change day by day, season by season.

11. Plan at least one thing you'll do each day.

Even if your grief is very painful and your energy very low, plan ahead to complete at least one thing each day, even if it's small. Then follow through with your plan, day after day. Help yourself feel that you're not entirely at the mercy of this powerful experience—there are some things you can do.

12. Spend time in your loved one's space.

If it's what you want to do, you may sit in the other's favorite chair, or lie in their bed, or just stand for a few moments in their room or among their possessions. Do this if it brings you comfort. But don't do it if it feels too awkward. You'll know quickly enough what's right for you.

13. Journal.

Write out your thoughts and feelings. Do this whenever you feel the urge, but do it at least several times a week, if not several times a day. Don't censor what you write. In time, go back through your writings and notice how you're changing and growing. Write about that, too.

14. Rest.

Grieving is hard work. So do what's best for you: get your rest. Take naps if you wish. Lie down from time to time. Relax in a comfortable chair. Pace yourself so you have interludes in which you can replenish yourself. Give yourself permission to take things easy.

15. Purchase something soft to sleep with.

A teddy bear is a favorite choice for many. But there are other options. Select something that feels warm and cuddly. Then, whatever your age, cuddle it.

16. Write the one who died.

Write letters or other messages to your loved one, thoughts you wish you could express if they were present. And who knows but what they're not present in some way? Preserve what you write in your journal if you wish, or on stationery, or on a computer.

17. Get a physical.

It's a good idea to get a physical examination within a few months of the death. It's expected for you to experience various physical reactions when you're grieving, but it's also helpful to make sure that your body is acting normally, whatever "normal" may be for you. Your physician can be an important ally at this time of your life.

18. Get physical.

Exercise. Flex your muscles. Stretch your body. Expand your lungs. It will help you feel better. It really will.

19. If you're alone, and if you like animals, consider getting a pet.

The attention and affection a pet provides may help you adapt to the loss of the attention and affection you're experiencing. Pets can also be fun to play with. Certain pets offer you a sense of personal security, too.

20. Light a candle at mealtime.

Especially if you eat alone, but even if you don't, consider lighting a taper at the table in memory of your loved one. Pause to remember them as you light it.

21. Donate their possessions meaningfully.

Whether you give your loved one's personal possessions to someone you know or to a stranger, find ways to pass these things along so that others might benefit from them. Some wish to do this quickly following the death, while others wish to wait awhile.

22. Create a memory area at home.

In a space that feels appropriate, arrange a small tableau that honors the person: a framed photograph or two, perhaps a prized possession or award, or something they created, or something they loved. This might be placed on a small table, or a mantel, or a desk. Some people like to use a grouping of candles.

23. Drink water.

Grieving people can easily become dehydrated. Crying can naturally lead to that. And with your normal routines turned upside down, you may simply not drink as much or as regularly as you did before the death. Make this one way you care for yourself.

24. Use your hands.

Sometimes it helps to do repetitive things with your hands, something you don't have to think about very much because it becomes second nature. Knitting and crocheting are like that. So are carving, woodworking, polishing, solving jigsaw puzzles, painting, braiding, shoveling, washing, and countless other activities.

25. Begin your day with your loved one.

If your grief is young, you'll probably wake up thinking of that person anyway. So why not decide that you'll include her or him from the start? Focus this time in a positive way. Bring to your mind fulfilling memories. Recall lessons this person taught you, "gifts" he or she gave you. Think about how you can spend your day in ways that would be in keeping with your loved one's best self, and with your best self. Then carry that best self with you through your day.

26. Invite someone to be your phone buddy.

If your grief and sadness hit you especially hard at times and you have no one nearby to turn to, ask someone you trust to be your telephone buddy. Gain their permission to call them whenever you feel you're at loose ends, day or night.

27. Avoid certain people if you must.

No one likes to be unfriendly or cold. But if there are people in your life who make it very difficult for you to do your grieving, then try to stay out of their way. Some people may lecture you, or belittle you, or antagonize you, either knowingly or unknowingly. Take care of your health during your grief, including your emotional health.

28. Listen to music.

Choose the music you believe will help you at a given moment, whether it's contemporary or ancient, instrumental or vocal, secular or religious. Let the sounds surround you and soothe you. Take this music with you, if you wish, as you go about your day.

29. Do something your loved one would enjoy.

Remember the one who died in your own unique way. One widowed woman has a special sauerkraut meal once a year. She doesn't like this tangy dish herself, but it was her husband's favorite, and she finds solace in remembering him in that way. There are probably a hundred different things you could do that once brought meaning or satisfaction to the one you loved. The meaning and satisfaction don't have to end.

30. Write stories about your loved one.

Recreate those events you don't want to forget. Write them out in detail. Describe everything as well as you can. Add dialogue as you wish. Make an entire collection of stories. It will help you today and it will become a valuable resource for yourself and others in the future.

31. Screen your entertainment.

Some TV shows and movies are best not viewed when you're deep in grief. The same goes for certain books or articles. Do a bit of research before you find yourself in the midst of an experience which brings up too many feelings for you to handle comfortably.

32. Read practical books and articles on grief.

Reading is a great way to find your way through this roundabout experience. Steer clear of those books that are like textbooks for professionals. Go for the ones that speak to you directly and honestly as a person in mourning.

35. Engage your soul.

You'll want to do this your own way. Some people meditate, some pray, and some spend time alone in nature. Some worship with a congregation and others do it on their own. Many grieving people begin to sense that all of us, living and dead, are connected on a spiritual level in a way that defies easy understanding. Include your soul as you grow through your grief.

36. Change some things.

As soon as it seems right, alter some things in your home to make clear this significant change that has occurred. Rearrange a room or replace a piece of furniture or give away certain items that will never again be used in your home. This does not mean to remove all signs of the one who died. It does mean not treating your home or your loved one's room as a shrine.

37. Plan ahead for special days.

Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and other special events can be difficult times, especially for the first year or two. Give thought beforehand for how you will handle those days. Do things a little differently than you used to, as a way of acknowledging this change in your life. But also be sure to invoke that person's presence and memory somehow during the day.

38. Allow yourself to laugh.

Sometimes something funny will happen to you, just like it used to. Sometimes you'll recall something hilarious that happened in the past. When that happens, go ahead and laugh if it feels funny to you. You won't be desecrating your loved one's memory. You'll be consecrating their love of life, and your own, too.

39. Allow yourself to cry.

Crying often goes naturally with grief. Tears well up and fall even when you least expect them. Subdued sniffles can become racking sobs on a moment's notice. It may feel awkward to you, but this is not unusual for a person in your situation. A good rule of thumb is this: if you feel like crying, then cry. If not, then don't. Some grieving people seldom cry—it's just their way.

40. Talk to the other one.

If it helps, you might "talk with" the one who died as you drive alone in your car, or as you stand beside the grave, or as you screw up your courage to make an important decision. This talking might be out loud, or under your breath. Either way, it's the same: you're simply wishing the other was with you so you could talk things over, and for the moment you're doing the best you can to continue that conversation. This inclination will go away when the time is right.

41. Donate in the other's name.

Honor the other's memory and spirit by giving a gift or gifts to a cause the other would appreciate. World hunger? A favorite charity? A local fund raiser? A building project? Extend that person's influence just a bit farther.

42. Plant yourself in nature.

Dig a flower garden and keep it in color as long as possible. Dig a vegetable garden and stay close to it until frost. Walk in forests and put your hands on trees. Collect leaves and wildflowers. Watch firsthand how rivers and lakes and oceans behave.

43. Connect on the Internet.

You'll find various resources for people in grief, as well as the opportunity to "chat" with fellow grievers. You can link up with others without leaving your home. You'll also find much more to expand your horizons as a person who is beginning to grow.

44. Read how others have responded to a loved one's death.

You may feel that your own grief is all you can handle. But if you'd like to look at the ways others have done it, try C. S. Lewis's *A Grief Observed*, Lynn Caine's *Widow*, John Bramblett's *When Good-Bye Is Forever*, or Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Lament for a Son*. There are many others. Check with a counselor or a librarian.

45. Learn about your loved one from others.

Listen to the stories others have to tell about the one who died, both stories you're familiar with and those you've never heard before. Spend time with their friends or schoolmates or colleagues. Invite them into your home. Solicit the writings of others.

46. Give yourself rewards.

Be kind to yourself in grief. Do those things for yourself that you really enjoy, perhaps at the end of a long day, or in the midst of a lonely time. Treat yourself to a favorite meal or delicacy. Get a massage. Buy some flowers. Do something frivolous that makes you feel good.

47. Do something for someone else.

Step out of your own problems from time to time and devote your attention to someone else. Offer a gift or your service. Do this for yourself as well as the other.

48. Write down your lessons.

Reflect upon what it is you're learning. State it as plainly as you're able. Remember those lessons as you go about your days.

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