



THE FOUR TASKS OF MOURNING

ACCEPT THE REALITY OF THE LOSS

When someone dies, even if the death is expected, there is a sense that it hasn't happened. The first task of grieving is to face the reality that the person is dead, that the person is gone and will not return, that reunion in this life is impossible. Denying the facts of the loss, the meaning of the loss, or the irreversibility of the loss only serves to prolong the grief process. Though denial or hope for reunion is normal immediately after the loss, this illusion is usually short-lived.

EXPERIENCE THE PAIN OF GRIEF

Many people try to avoid the painful feelings by various ways such as "being strong", moving away, avoiding painful thoughts, "keeping busy", etc. There is no adaptive way of avoiding it. You must allow yourself to experience and express your feelings. Anger, guilt, loneliness, anxiety, and depression are among the feelings and experiences that are normal during this time. Recall and relate both pleasant and unpleasant memories of the deceased. Ask for the support of friends. Tell them what you need from them, because people often misunderstand the needs of grieving. Be assured that the memory of your loved one will continue, but the pain will lessen in time and will finally disappear.

ADJUST TO AN ENVIRONMENT WITH THE DECEASED MISSING

This means different things to different people, depending on what the relationship was. Many survivors, especially widowed persons, resent or fear having to develop new skills and to take on roles that were formerly performed by the deceased. There may be many practical daily affairs you need help and advice with, but there will be a great sense of pride in being able to master these challenges. The emotions involved in letting go are painful but necessary to experience. By not doing so, you will remain stuck in the grief process and unable to resolve your loss.

WITHDRAW EMOTIONAL ENERGY AND REINVEST IT IN OTHER RELATIONSHIPS

The final task is to affect an emotional withdrawal from the deceased person so that this emotional energy can be used in continuing a productive life. This does not necessarily mean finding a new spouse, surrogate mother, etc. It does mean re-entering the stream of life without your deceased loved one. You must rebuild your own ways of satisfying your social, emotional, and practical needs by developing new or changed activities or relationships. This is NOT dishonoring the memory of the deceased and doesn't mean that you love him or her any less. It simply recognizes that there are other people and things to be loved and you are capable of loving.

Adapted from:

GRIEF COUNSELING AND GRIEF THERAPY by J. William Worden, Ph.D