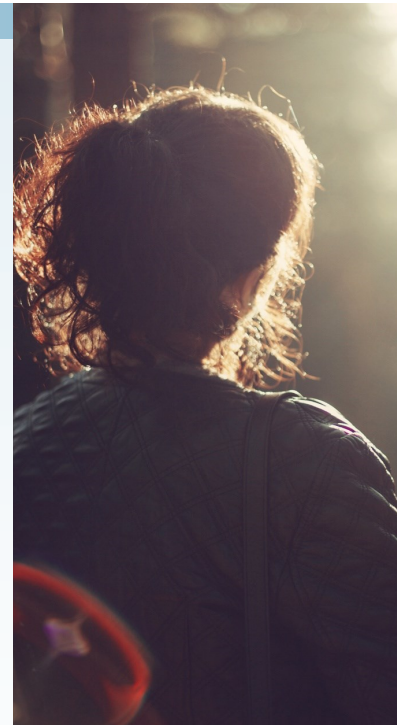


After the First Year—Thoughts for the Bereaved

The first year after bereavement brings raw pain, disbelief, reality and many other deep emotions. Emotions many of us have never experienced before in such depth. The time period after the first year is usually not quite as pain filled as all the firsts were. Although we may be a little better, often we are not nearly as healed as we would like. It helps to understand this next period and to learn some skills for coping. It is most helpful if we lower our expectations of ourselves, work on our grief and hold on to HOPE.

Remember, grief is different for everyone. It is like fingerprints or snowflakes, no two are alike. Every one grieves differently, so do not compare yourself to others or place yourself on a timetable. Some of the following suggestions/observations may help you:

- Beware of becoming critical of ourselves, either consciously or unconsciously, due to unrealistic expectations.
- A different level of reality may hit you. We usually no longer deny the death, but now face the reality and its long run implications.
- If the death is unexpected, some say the second year is even more difficult.
- It may be the time to struggle with new life patterns. We may have handled grief by over-activity (workaholic etc.). If our previous style of grieving has not been helpful, we must be willing to try new approaches such as; becoming active in a support group, read about grief, talk with friends who LISTEN, do our grief work, seek professional help, hold on to HOPE.
- It is so important to find friends with who we can talk. This is the one significant factor that prevents people from sliding into deep depression.
- We should carefully consider the phases of grief. Subconsciously one or more phases may be giving us trouble such as anger/guilt. If so, recognize the phase and work on it. Don't rush it down or ignore it.



Memories

I feel a warmth around me,
like your presence is so
near.

And I close my eyes to visualize
your face when you
were here.

I endure the times we
spent together, and they
are locked inside my heart.

As long as I have those
memories, we will never be
apart.

Even though we cannot
speak anymore, my voice
is always there,

because every night before
I sleep, I have you in my
prayer.

— Louise Bailey

After The First Year continued

- Other events in our life may also be grief situations (trouble with spouse, children, work, other family members, friends). Realize this happens to many grieving people and it does complicate your grief.
- You may or may not cry as often, but when you do, realize it is therapeutic. Don't fight the tears. As the author Jean G. Jones says in Time Out for Grief, "cry when you have to—laugh when you can."
- Physical symptoms may become more acute (stomach disorders, headaches, sleeplessness). **Have a check up!**
- Insufficient sleep plagues many bereaved. It may be helpful to give up all caffeine (colas, coffee, tea, anacin, etc.) Beware of alcohol which is a depressant. Some findings indicate that alcohol causes insomnia. Physical exercise helps to relax and tire one.
- Check frequently that you have balance in your life...rest, read, recreation (including exercise), prayer, and work.
- Depression may enter your life again or for the first time. Coping with depression is very difficult. Again, we need determination, understanding, friends, and possible the help of a professional counselor if our depression is deep and long.
- Our grief may seem "out of control." We may feel as if "we are going crazy." This is common to bereaved people. It is important to realize grief work takes time. Much more time than we think it should. Be patient with yourself.
- Don't expect your grief to be over after a year. You will incorporate it into your life.

Today and always, may loving memories bring you strength, comfort and peace. – Anonymous

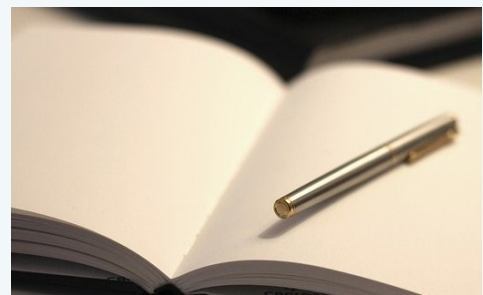
Express Your Thoughts and Feelings

You may find it helpful to "sort out" your thoughts about your loved one by writing a letter to the person who died.

The things that are bothering you the most are excellent ideas to journal about. It helps connect you to the messages coming from your heart.

Express your thoughts and feeling about:

- A special memory that I have about you...
- What I miss the most about you and our relationship...
- What I wish I had said or had not said...
- What I'd like to ask you...
- What I wish we'd done or had not done...
- What I have had the hardest time dealing with...
- Ways in which you will continue to live on in me...
- Special ways I have for keeping my memories of you alive...



After the First Year continued

The following story shows how a person lived through the first anniversary and how grief did soften in the subsequent years:

“ *I was genuinely surprised at how awful the last anniversary of my husband's death was. And it wasn't just that one date; I was a mess for over a month beforehand. I had terrible nightmares, insomnia at times, physical complaints, incredible irritability. It seemed that I had undone all the grief work I had accomplished to date. My reactions came as a frightening, confusing development. It wasn't until about a week after the anniversary that I gained any perspective on what I had just gone through. In that week or so, I began to regain my equilibrium. I calmed down, I slept, I felt relieved. It seemed so obvious then; I had subconsciously relived all those events again and there was no way to avoid this. I had dreaded the anniversary date but had suppressed my feelings. As this first calendar year unfolded, each special day reminded me of the fact that just one year ago on that day my husband and I had been together. And I knew what was coming next— THAT day.*

The inescapable fact is that the first anniversary is going to be a fiasco. You are going to feel absolutely rotten. But one thing I learned is that if you accept this simple fact, then you won't feel so bad about feeling bad. In other words, if you expect to feel badly then you can face your fears and take action. The next year, I was better prepared. I expected to feel lousy beforehand. I surely did, too, but for only about a month before the anniversary. The day itself I went to church and cried. It was a comfort to cry, it was appropriate.

After 5 years I still get anxious and unhappy before the anniversary, but each year the pain is less, the period of dread is shortened. I've learned how to manage the pain, how to be nurtured by HOPE.

-KJ ”



*Grief is a cocoon from which
we emerge new.
When grief rings; surrender.
The delivery is utter
transformation.*

— Glennon Doyle



Letting Go

by Beverly J. Ahmann-Digna

*Letting go should be so easy...
Just close the door, turn around,
walk away
Shut my eyes, say goodbye, and
end the day.*

*Letting go is not so easy...
It's never to hear your voice again
Except sometimes at night.
It's knowing that no matter what
I'll never make it right.*

*Letting go takes time...
To convince myself that part of
me
Is forever gone.
To really believe my life has
changed
That I must now move on.*

*Letting go will come...
I will open up to a new direction
Fully knowing the cost
While the emptiness insie myself
Reminds me of what I've lost.*

*Letting go is not disloyal...
I will never forget your life, or
mine
Where you played a part
It will simply be a new beginning
That you will help me start.*

*Every sunset brings us peace,
Every sunrise brings us hope.*

-Kem Lee Sun

Letting go...

Letting go doesn't mean giving up... it means moving forward. It is one of the hardest things a person can do.



Starting at birth, we grasp on to anything we can get our hands on, and hold on as if we will cease to exist when we let go. We feel that letting go is giving up, quitting, and that as we all know is cowardly.

But as we grow older we are forced to change our way of thinking. We are forced to realize that letting go means accepting things that cannot be. It means maturing and moving forward, no matter how hard you have to fight yourself to do so.

