

Tools for the Journey

How do you weather the intense emotions of grief? Using healthy coping tools, like the ones listed below, are steps in the right direction. Finding tools that work well is an ongoing process.

- **Grieve your loss.** Fast paced lives, full of responsibility, can make some feel as if there is no time to grieve the loss of a loved one. For others, the emotions associated with this loss are far too overwhelming. Make the time to grieve. Grief doesn't care how full your schedule is or the fact you are too overwhelmed. Grief will find a way out. Working through the grief or ignoring grief is a choice.
- **Talk about your loss.** For many, one of the best tools for the journey through grief is talking. Talking makes the loss real. Talking helps the mind absorb the information of the events leading up to the death and the death itself. Talk with family and friends. Find someone who will listen unconditionally and not "tell you what to do" or to "get over it and move on". Better yet, join a grief support group. A support group can offer support, encouragement and hope as well as validate your grief experience.
- **Write about your loss.** For some writing is a resourceful tool. Journaling can be a wonderful means to release the intense emotions of grief. Record your thoughts, fears and concerns daily. Charting your progress provides comfort for those times you feel overwhelmed with grief. Write a letter to your loved one. Letter writing is another way to say all the things you didn't get the opportunity to tell your loved one. Suggested topics include: "What I always wanted you to tell me", "What I always wanted to tell you", "The biggest change I've experienced since you died", "I am most grateful for..."
- **Breathe.** When we experience a dramatic life change, we tend to breathe on the surface of our chest. This in itself can create anxiety and add more stress to life. Take breaks through out the day and focus on your breathing. Breathe up through your diaphragm. Breathe slowly and concentrate on pushing the stress out through each breath. This breathing exercise can be any time of the day and is a great stress buster.

- **Recognize your grieving style.** Grief is an individual journey. Understand that each of us have our own way of coping with loss. There are two distinctive styles of grieving. The Feelers experience a strong emotional response to the death. It helps them to cry a lot and talk about the loss. The Thinkers are not overwhelmed with emotions. They don't like to talk about the loss, they would rather think about it. Thinkers are action oriented; they find comfort in doing chores and problem solving. Both of these grieving styles are normal.
- **Take care of yourself.** Grief work is physically, emotionally and spiritually exhausting. Take a warm bath. Use candles or aromatherapy as a stress reducer. Play soft music before going to bed. Prayer in any form can provide peace, strength and comfort. Exercise. Keep it simple liking walking for 10 minutes, taking a yoga class or trying something more invigorating like Tae-Bo or step aerobics. Find a form of exercise that works for you!
- **Read about your loss.** Learn more about grief and bereavement. It is common to experience feelings of confusion, an inability to concentrate and feel restless. While these are common attributes of loss, it is not common knowledge in society. Many helpful books address the subject of grief; ask you local hospice or library for a suggested reading list. Understanding the grief process is the first step to learning to live with loss. Remember: *Healing is a choice, healing is your right and healing is your responsibility.*
- **Celebrate.** Celebrating anything at this time may seem like an absurd notion given your present circumstances. However, it can be a powerful tool to use on the journey. Sharing memories of your loved one is a way of celebrating their life. Celebration suggestions: create a memory book or box that includes pictures, items or favorite sayings of you loved one; plant a tree or small perennial garden in their memory; donate your loved one's favorite book, video or CD to your local library; or create your own celebration of remembrance.

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