



Tools for Coping

Here are some tools for coping with the everyday feelings and realities of living when you are experiencing a major loss, illness, death, separation or any life change.

- ◆ Be gentle with your own feeling process. Avoid self-judgment. Do not put "I should have" on yourself.
- ◆ Find a supportive person or persons you can trust. Share your honest feelings.
- ◆ Give yourself time for healing. The timing of grief cannot be rushed. Plan your time so that you have specific time to focus on your loss, and special time to escape from the pain of the reality of what you are facing.
- ◆ When you experience fear, anger, helplessness, sorrow, pain, emptiness, isolation, depression, relief -it can be very confusing. Questions to ask yourself, to focus are:
 - How do I feel right now? (Check body sensations, as well as thoughts and emotions)
 - What do I need right now? (Focus on immediate, attainable needs)
 - How can I meet (or get a supportive friend to help me meet) these needs right now?
- ◆ Try to maintain as "regular" a schedule as possible. Avoid unrealistic expectations/goals of yourself.
- ◆ Maintain an awareness of your body's need for nutrition and rest. If symptoms arise that are new or unusual, see a physician.
- ◆ Listening to your body is critical during this period- listening is different than "doing something for" your body. Listening means to honor the message your body is sending you.
- ◆ Words or tears that are unexpressed will cause a lump in our throats.
- ◆ Anger that is held inside can give us an upset stomach, headache or tight neck and shoulders.
- ◆ Fear can be expressed by wringing hands, shakiness or queasy stomachs.
- ◆ Guilt or resentment can feel like physical burdens we are carrying. (I feel like I weigh a ton)
- ◆ Sorrow or depression can feel like pressure or "breaking" in our heart or chest area. Breathing may be labored. We may heave great sighs.
- ◆ Often combinations of feelings are felt. It is important to ask the part of the body that is feeling these sensations the following:
 - If you could talk, what would you say?
 - What would you need?
 - What picture or symbol best expresses you right now? What do you look like?
 - What is happening with you right now?

- ◆ Writing a letter or drawing a picture about our illness, loss or grief are healing ways to get your feelings from the inside to the outside. Writing to others with whom you feel incomplete or to your body, or to institutions, the universe, your illness, God, or anybody enables you to process what your body longs to say. It also enables you to release anger, frustration and isolation and move to a forgiving, life-affirming love for yourself and those who have touched your life.
- ◆ Record a life evaluation: Who and what has been important in my life? Have I done what I wanted in my life? What needs to be done for me to be fulfilled? What activities would give me the most satisfaction right now? Is there anything or anyone with whom I feel incomplete or unfinished at this time? Is there anything I need to do about that for me?
- ◆ Realize the world around you and your daily activities will be filled with landmines -moments of painful realizations of your loss and resentment at a world that marches on, apparently without noticing or caring. Verbalize these feelings. They are normal.
- ◆ As a person facing grief or illness, you will be stigmatized. People will not know how to handle you or make you better. They may even be afraid of you, because you represent fear and pain that could come into their lives. Allow yourself to be gently honest about your needs. Focus on taking care of yourself and surrounding yourself with caring people who will accept your process. You do not have to make it better for the world. This is a time to care for YOU as you would the most tender, vulnerable child who is hurting.

FOR YOU, when you are left with an empty or breaking heart...

- Realize and recognize the loss. Take time for nature's slow, sure, stuttering process of healing.
- Give yourself massive doses of restful relaxation and routine busy-ness.
- Know that powerful, overwhelming feelings will lessen with time.
- Be vulnerable, share your pain and be humble enough to accept support.
- Surround yourself with life, plants, animals and friends.
- Use mementos to help your mourning, not to live in the past.
- Avoid rebound relationships, big decisions and anything addictive.
- Keep a diary and record successes, memories and struggles.
- Prepare for change, new interests, new friends, solitude, creativity, and growth.
- Know that holidays and anniversaries can bring back the painful feelings you thought you had worked through.
- Recognize that forgiveness (of yourself and others) is a vital part of the healing process and that it cannot be rushed.
- Realize that any new death or loss related crisis will bring up feelings about past losses.

REMEMBER...

Grief is a spiral of feelings, seasons and experiences. It is not a straight line with a beginning and ending. The process of grief is healing the pain of loss and keeping the treasured memories and love within your heart.



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