

ACKNOWLEDGE – The first step in dealing with difficult feelings, such as grief, anger, pain, guilt, sadness, etc, is to acknowledge that you are experiencing them. Listen to your body-and different sensations and feelings your body is experiencing. Attempt to quiet the 'rational mind' that will sometimes try to convince you that you are fine- that nothing's wrong. Accept your feelings, whatever they are. Try not to judge them (C'mon, you don't have the right to feel that way), transcend them (I'm too nice a person to have these feelings) or feel like you have to act them out (well, if I feel that way, I guess I'll just have to kill myself, or kill someone else). Feelings are irrational ... sometimes we may never know why we are feeling a certain way. The important thing to remember is whatever feelings are present, are okay.

EXPRESS – The next step in healing feelings is to get the feelings from inside the body to the outside. An ancient Chinese proverb states, "A feeling held inside increases its strength a thousand times". This is where it can be difficult to find a safe person and place to do this. Talking helps; especially talking about the details of the feelings – the horror, the guilt, the incident, or the aftermath. Letter writing to the person you are having the feelings about also helps, even if this person might be dead or far away. Even letter writing to yourself is helpful (the origin of diaries or journals). Drawing, painting or artwork is a good way to get feelings out, but be sure to make it a free flowing experience where you are not judging your "creation". The healing is the doing, not the finished product. Hitting pillows, banging on phone books with rubber hoses, running, or doing anything physically active is another outlet for feelings. Screaming, yelling and crying are other healthy releases.

ACT – The third step in healing feelings is to do something active to begin the healing process, sometimes this can begin in expressing the feelings, lighting candle, doing a ritual (visiting the grave, planting a tree, having a celebration of life), wearing a ribbon or some other indication that we are in a tender, vulnerable place or creating a book of memories. Sometimes, we need to burn or bury what we need to let go of as a physical way to release. With guilt, sometimes we need to do some act for atonement to begin the healing. However insignificant or silly it seems, allow your own creativity to tell you what you need to do. You know better than anyone else what would make you feel a little lighter, a little more resolved, a little better.

RECONNECT – Reconnect to what is good in life. After the hard work of healing feelings, it is vitally important that we give ourselves a reward. When working with feelings, it is good to focus on them for a limited period, and then give oneself a break. During this break, do something which brings you comfort or joy. You can share time with others or just allow you to do something nurturing or 'selfish'. When we deal with feelings we tap into a special part of us that is very childlike. And while we are very capable adults most of the time, it is important to acknowledge and support that little child of our hearts and to move on with the joy and meaning our life can give us. And remember, this does not take hours of therapy, feelings do not last forever if they are allowed to come out and we are not only our feelings, we are complex, multifaceted human beings who have the ability to deal with our feelings in a positive empowering way.

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