

HOSPICE *of the* VALLEY
Bereavement Literature

AFTER THE FIRST YEAR- THEN WHAT?

“Time heals,” many people say. It may. It may help to dull your pain. But the medicine of time, taken by itself, is not sure. Time is neutral. What helps is what you do with time.”

– Rabbi Earl A. Grollman

The first year of bereavement brings raw pain, disbelief, the agony of reality and many other deep emotions – emotions many of us have never experienced or at least not to the same 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 exactly alike. Everyone grieves differently, so don't compare yourself to others or place yourself on a timetable.

Some of the following suggestions / observations may help you:

- Be aware of becoming critical of yourself, either consciously or unconsciously, due to unrealistic expectations.
- A different level of reality may hit you. You usually no longer deny the death, but now face the reality and its long-term implications.
- If the death was unexpected, some say that the second year is even more difficult.
- It may be the time to struggle with new life patterns. You may have handled grief by overactivity and excessive “busyness.” If a previous style of grieving has not been helpful, it's time to try new approaches, such as becoming more active in a support group; finding telephone friends; reading about grief; developing coping skills; becoming determined not to get stuck in grief; doing your grief work; holding onto hope.
- It is vital to find a friend with whom you may talk. This is the one significant factor that prevents people from sliding into deep depression. You can find such help in a support group.
- Carefully consider the normal grief reactions. One or more reactions may be giving you trouble, such as anger or guilt. If so, recognize the reaction and work on it. Don't push it down or ignore it.
- Other events in your life may also be adding to your grief (trouble with work, family members or friends). Realize this happens to many grieving people and it does complicate your grief.
- You may or may not cry as often as you did at first, but when you do, realize it is therapeutic. Don't fight the tears. As 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 checkup.
- Insufficient sleep plagues many bereaved. It may be helpful to give up all caffeine and alcohol. Physical exercise helps you to relax and makes you sleepy.

HOSPICE *of the* VALLEY
Bereavement Literature

- Check frequently that you have balance in your life – work, recreation (including exercise, hobbies, reading), adequate rest and prayer.
- Don't be alarmed if depression reenters your life or appears for the first time. Depression is normal and its recurrence is also normal.
- Your grief may seem “out of control.” You may feel as if you are “going crazy.” This is common to bereaved people. It is important to realize that grief work takes time – Much more time that you think it should. Be patient with yourself.
- Be aware of a lowered self-esteem. You might think to yourself, “I don't like the person I've become.” Often it is the unrealistic expectations you may have of yourself to be handling your grief better – no doubt you are doing better than you're giving yourself credit for.
- You often hear, “Time will heal.” Yes, time does soften the hurt a bit, but mainly it is what you do with time: read, talk, struggle with your reactions, get help when you become stuck in a certain place, be gentle with yourself, lower your expectations, build a pleasant time with family and friends, pray to your loved one.
- It helps to consider that your loved one is happy – free of pain and hassles – that you'll be together again. Also, if you died, would you want your loved ones to mourn deeply the rest of their lives? You would want them to enjoy life as much as possible, and your loved one wants this for you as well.
- Pride may be one of your greatest stumbling blocks. You may think that you should be doing much better – you may not want to acknowledge that you need help.
- Vibes from friends may openly or subconsciously be, “Shape up – you must be over it by now. Get on with living, etc.” You not only experience the death of a loved one, but you feel abandoned by friends and even family. Find others to talk with who understand. These friends may come from those who attend your support group meetings.
- Loneliness may seem to engulf you as you look ahead to a life without your loved one. Find new friends, worthwhile work (support groups always need help with phoning, mailings, research, etc.) and connect with friends from the past. Pleasant memories can help, too.
- If you feel guilty, it must be acknowledged – not suppressed. Really look at the “if only's.” Hopefully you and only you will be able to say to yourself, “I did the best I could at the time – so did my loved one.”
- WHY? If the “why” is bothering you, ask it again and again until you can come to terms with it. You may never know why. It may remain a mystery that you choose to let go of. When you can, concentrate on your choice to get better.

Realize that anger may be at yourself, God, the person who died, those in the helping professions who did not seem to understand or help. Acknowledging your anger is the first step in releasing its power over you.

Don't expect too much of your family. They, too, have their hands full of grief.

Consider even though you are struggling with grief, you would rather have had the time with your loved one than not to have had that person in your life at all.

HOSPICE *of the* VALLEY
Bereavement Literature

Set realistic goals for the future – realistic is the key word. Pinpoint your most acute concerns. Think of all possible solutions. Choose one solution at a time and implement it.

So many of us have been brought up to be independent: “I’m going to handle this grief myself.” We find it difficult to ask for help. Yet we need help. Asking for help from caring people can make a big difference in your working through your grief. Force yourself to reach out for help.

Often, when we slide back into the pits, we panic. We hate the feeling. Irrationally we feel that we will remain there. It is important to realize that you’ve been in the pits before, and will be again, but you **WILL GET BETTER**.

Be a fighter against giving up and becoming stuck in grief, as 15% of grieving people do. A determination to work through grief may be one of the common denominators of those who recover. It is up to you.

-Author Unknown