



Family and Caregiver Education

BEREAVEMENT

The Four Tasks of Mourning

J. William Worden, professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School, developed a model that he calls “The Four Tasks of Mourning.” Loss and grief happen *to* us, but this model suggests that there is much we can *do* to successfully complete the work of mourning.

Task 1: To accept the reality of the loss.

- Acceptance is both intellectual and emotional, and requires many different experiences in order to become real to us.

Task 2: To process the pain of grief.

- The type of pain experienced depends on many factors unique to each relationship.
- Many people benefit from outside support to help face and endure the pain of loss. It does soften and lessen over time.

Task 3: To adjust to a world without the deceased.

- Adjustments are wide-ranging, including external adjustments (daily living without the person), internal adjustments (Who am I now?) and spiritual adjustments (finding new ways to view the world).
- There are opportunities to find new capabilities and to create purposeful changes.

Task 4: To find an enduring connection with the deceased while embarking on a new life.

- Acceptance of the loss does not mean a relationship with the deceased has ended. Finding one’s unique way of continuing a connection with the deceased is normal and healthy.
- Realistic goals of grief work include regaining an interest in life and feeling hopeful again, discovering new aspects of self, and forming new relationships—moving forward.

J. William Worden (2009)

Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy (Third Edition): A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner.
New York: Spring Publishing Co.

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