

When Someone You Love Has Died: Steps to Survival

The following are suggestions for specific actions that bereaved individuals can take in their journey toward adjusting to their loss and returning to the mainstream of living.

Healing has progressions and regressions: Healing and growth is not a smooth upward progression, but full of ups and downs – dramatic leaps and depressing back-slides.

Take good care of yourself: Get plenty of rest. Stick to a schedule. Plan your days. Activity will give you a sense of order.

Keep decision-making to a minimum: Expect your judgment to be clouded for a while. You are going through change; try not to add stress by making major decisions.

Seek support: Do not just accept comfort from others – seek it. It is human and courageous.

Surround yourself with living things: A new plant, pet or bowl of fresh fruit.

Re-affirm your beliefs: Use your faith right now – explore it, lean on it – grow.

Weekends and holidays may be difficult: Schedule activities you particularly enjoy, ahead of time.

Do your mourning now: Try to allow yourself to be with your pain – it will pass sooner. Postponed grief can return later to haunt you. Grief feelings need to be expressed (one way or another).

Be gentle with yourself: You have suffered a disabling emotional wound – treat yourself with care. Try to avoid self-critical statements like "I should be over this" or "I shouldn't be angry."

Let yourself heal completely: Give yourself time. Do not jump into new things too quickly.

Keep nutrition in mind: Good eating habits help the healing process.

Recognize your vulnerability: Your resistance will be low – invite help from those who are trustworthy.

Beware of the rebound: There is a hole in your life. Be careful about rushing to fill it.

Be alert to addictive activities: Alcohol, drugs, food, diversions – may momentarily help us escape from pain. These substances never help us to heal.

Keep a journal: Putting your thoughts and feelings on paper is a good way to get them out. You can look back and see how far you have come.

Heal at your own pace: Try not to compare yourself to another grieving person. Each of us has our own time clock.

Begin to look to the future: Begin to experiment with new lifestyles – new ways of filling the day. They might even turn out to be fun.

Give yourself praise: You have suffered a tremendous loss, and you are coping. You are a better person for having loved.

Be open: Give yourself opportunities to meet new people, places, ideas, experiences, but do not forget to build on the past. Do not throw out what has been worthwhile to you. Small changes might be the best at first.

Begin to give of yourself: Giving can bring you the greatest joy. It allows us to get out of ourselves. Join a support group, it is healing.

Expect relapses: There will always be certain things that trigger sadness again. This is normal.

Enjoy your freedom: You are now in control. Make the most of your choices - you can even learn to take risks.