

# How to Deal with Depression When Mourning the Death of a Loved One

By Lou LaGrand

Are you filled with despair and emptiness? Has life lost its meaning for you, and no one could possibly understand your feelings? Do you believe there is no future without your loved one? It is likely, if you are feeling this way that you are suffering from what is often called normal reactive depression. You are down and reacting because something or someone you cherish is gone.

We are not talking here about clinical or biochemical depression, although reactive depression can evolve into the clinical type. Depression from the loss of a loved one usually does not require medication, although in some instances it is prescribed, and is useful on a temporary basis. Here is what you need to know.

1. Not everyone gets depressed after the death of a loved one. It is perfectly normal not to suffer depression as it is to have to deal with it. However, after the death of a loved one, thoughts and attitudes often trigger loneliness and resulting depression, which occurs early in grieving. It features confusion, little motivation, altered self-esteem, lack of meaning, reduced functioning in one's social circle, insomnia, and low energy.
2. If you are depressed, acknowledge it. Describe it in detail, where it hurts, and what it feels like. "What is the message or messages this emotion is delivering to me?" is an important question to address. What do I need to accept? To let go of? The refusal to accept the loss is often a root cause of depression. Depending on what you believe about your depression will lead to choices that either help you manage it, or prolong it.
3. Talk to your best friend. Remember, the more you isolate yourself--and this is what depression tends to do--the more you will increase emotional and physical stress. Saying how you really feel (especially what you fear and how angry you may be) to someone you are confident of being with, is an excellent antidote for your grief and to deal with depression. And, forgiving yourself and others, will also release depressed feelings.
4. Use a universal treatment for depression: exercise. Physical activity will have an affect on brain chemistry and help in the management of depression. Take 10-15 minute walks, preferably with someone. This will activate your endorphins and affect mood.
5. Find a symbol of comfort and guidance. Create a symbol that will bring back loving memories of the person who died and/or of your Higher Power who is with you at all times, and will help you through your great loss. Keep the symbol in a place where you will see it often and use it as a cue to think of loving memories--and to accept the new conditions of life.

6. Are deep seated negative beliefs (I can't go on alone, I'm being punished, I'm never going to feel better, I'm worthless, etc.) adding to your depression? Regain your power. Take it back from those beliefs that say you are less and not more. Believe you can get well. Create opposing affirmations and keep repeating them throughout the day.

7. Start learning to tolerate uncertainty. This can be accomplished by turning toward your spiritual and symbolic beliefs. You will increase your options by letting your spiritual beliefs guide you and strengthen your faith that you will get through this hurtful loss. Know what you can and cannot control. You can control how you deal with major changes; you cannot control what others say and do or what has already happened.

8. Let possibility educate you out of depression. Here is where your imagination can help in a very positive way. Are you open to exploring the numerous choices there are for dealing with loss? Begin to learn about them from others, support groups, readings, and the experts. By creating options for dealing with fear, anger, guilt, and negative thoughts, you can change your view of what lies ahead.

9. Check your eating habits and whether you have an insufficiency of amino acids. Protein consumption at all three meals can affect neurotransmitters and your energy levels. Reduce carbohydrate (not complex carbs), sugar, alcohol, and fast food consumption, and increase fruits and vegetables. The way you feel physically will add to or detract from depression.

Whenever you feel depression creeping back in, immediately ask yourself this key question, "What are my choices here?" If you are burying your feelings and not facing them, depression is a common result.

Refuse to withdraw from life; make connections and express your feelings to a support group or to your best friend. If your depressive symptoms go on for more than a couple of months, be sure to consult a professional counselor. You can get through this darkness and into the light by taking action early (don't wait for it to worsen) to deal with this pervasive emotion.