

# Does the Work of Grief Ever Really End?

By Lou LaGrand

Are you wondering if the pain will ever cease, if the emptiness will ever leave? Will life ever have meaning again? You may not think so now, but the answer to all three questions is an unqualified yes. And there are millions of people who can vouch for that fact.

But that does not mean you will be your old self once again. Nor does it imply that you will be somehow totally free from the anxiety of your loss experience. There are a constellation of variables that determine the intensity and the length of grief. They range from the type of death, number of secondary losses, and degree of emotional investment in the deceased to your coping behaviors, health, social support system, and expectations, to name just a few.

What do we know about the length and intensity of grief work, that process we have to go through to adapt to all of the changes imposed by the death of a loved one? Here is what will help you to arrive at your own answer to that question.

1. The intense feelings certainly lessen over time. That will be obvious. However, to put a time limit on how long they last is to dismiss one incontrovertible fact about grief--it is a highly individual process. So that great pain and emptiness can last days or weeks, depending on your individual variables.
2. You will also experience what may be interpreted as an ending to your grief, or at least a feeling that you are doing quite well--only to find yourself suddenly thrust right back to where you were a few weeks ago. This can be a very discouraging, albeit normal, occurrence. Some event may unfold where normally your loved one would have been with you, and you are brutally reminded of his/her absence.

What is often called the "year of the firsts" may include a number of these episodes. There is nothing wrong with feeling anxiety, anger, or a host of other emotions when this happens. It is not only normal, it is to be expected.

3. It is also quite possible that years later, when you have adapted to the physical absence of your loved one, a wedding, birth, graduation, or anniversary may bring a revisit of sadness or the need to cry and express emotions. Don't hold back on these feelings. They are a common result of memories and a part of life.
4. As said previously, grief work is a process of adaptation, or as many believe, a process of healing. That healing can go on for years with stops and starts that bring new awareness and views of life. In fact, there are a number of people who believe that healing never ends. (I have heard some say, once you grieve, you grieve forever.)

Perhaps we begin our healing attempts with our first major loss. Then with subsequent losses, we have to continue the healing process, learning as we go. Maybe adapting to change--or healing--is an ongoing or forever process. If it is, we need not make it an object of anxiety and give it unnecessary power to distract us from enjoying life.

So, does the work of grief ever end? The answer, of course, depends on your individual beliefs and interpretations. For some, grief work ostensibly ends at a point in time. For others, it is a matter of being revisited by grief. Whatever your belief, you can be sure each of us possess the inherent ability to deal with our losses. And, with a little help from our friends, make it through those early days of confusion and change.

Where it goes from there depends on our choices.