

How to Lessen the Pain of Doing Your Grief Work

By Lou LaGrand

Is the pain of grief wearing you down? Are you surprised at the depth of pain you are feeling? How have others been able to persist in such circumstances and do their grief work?

Grief work is a term coined by psychiatrist Eric Lindemann back in 1944 which highlights the fact that adapting to the death of a loved one takes much energy, commitment, and intense labor. The work of grief frequently entails both physical and emotional pain. And although the pain of major loss is inevitable, it can be controlled and in many instances reduced.

Here are six pivotal factors that will play key roles in how your grief work unfolds, whether it is prolonged, or becomes excessive. You cannot sidestep or ignore the pain, but you can clearly lessen its intensity.

1. Look for safe places and safe people. In times of loss we all need to find a safe familiar place to be and people who will let us be who we are at that time and not be over directing. Look especially for those who will accept your pain--as you express it--and not try to fix it. Stay away from toxic people who say the wrong things and add to your discomfort. If your home is constantly filled with caregivers, feel free to go to your bedroom or another part of the house to be alone and away from the constant buzz. These rest times are critical for the energy levels needed in mourning.
2. Take primary responsibility for confronting the pain. Even though you are deeply hurting, you are still in charge of how you grieve. Here are three essential steps: First, know that what you are feeling is normal even though you feel so out of control and helpless. You are not "losing it." Second, and here is where your responsibility weighs heavily, reach out to someone you trust for support. Yes, we need each other and it's OK to ask for help. Tell the person or persons you need them and specifically what you need. Thirdly, acknowledge when you have focused too much on your pain, and be willing to look for a quick distraction. It is okay and healthy to take a break from your grieving.
3. Refuse to let the reactions of others influence your normal response. After a period of a few weeks, you may have friends who are getting tired of your grieving. They may not want to talk about it or have excuses as to why they can't visit with you. Accept this common response, even if it is from a good friend. Simply continue to grieve as you see fit. Never let anyone set a time limit on your grief. You will know when it begins to ebb. And, remember, there is a wide range of normalcy.
4. Rely on your spiritual roots. Turn to your faith tradition and seek the spiritual sustenance it provides. Cry out for the strength to bear this burden. Beg for the wisdom to choose the path to adaptation and reinvestment in life that is best for you. If you nurture your spiritual self, you can bear any burden and get through this demanding ordeal.
5. Accept reduced output and activity. Do not expect to be able to keep up with the usual pace you are accustomed to, especially if you have to go back to your 9 to 5 job. Mourning is hard work and saps energy at a fast pace. This is why self-care is so important. Force yourself to take a daily stress break where you lie down, put your feet up, and rest. Take short walks. Treat yourself very well every day as it is not uncommon for mourners to become so worn down over time to become ill.
6. Commit to using your grief to grow. Be open to reviewing your beliefs about life, death, and the meaning associated with your loss. Learn all you can about grief and coping with it. Beliefs have a powerful affect on everything we do, especially when mourning the death of a loved one. Look at alternative beliefs and weather they are more meaningful for you than those you learned from well-meaning authority figures early in life. These beliefs often need to be challenged, especially when it comes to grief.

You have the power within you to cope with your great loss. Always look for upside people and rely on them to help you cope with your loss. Remember: your thoughts create where you are going in your grief. Find a way to spark your courage. Courage crushes fear whenever you take action. Taking decisive action is what grief work is all about. You will prevail.