

Healing After Loss

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To lose something of material value can suddenly leave us stunned and momentarily beside ourselves. But when we lose *someone* of value, that loss is magnified a thousand-fold...our lives are changed forever, and our sense of who we are becomes immeasurably shaken.

At some point in our lives, everyone suffers loss--some more than others--yet few of us are prepared for the anguish, the sense of aloneness, and the overwhelming feeling of devastation that follows. There is a defining moment in every person's life that changes us, shaping who and what we are. Loss is often a catalyst for that change, whether the loss is physical, emotional, spiritual or all of the above.



Loss can take place in many forms: death of a child, a parent, a spouse, a close friend or relative; loss of positive childhood experiences; loss of a pregnancy; loss of career and means of support; loss of a close relationship; global loss; loss of what it means to be happy.

The private tragedies that we all so often experience are some of the most tragic forms of loss: family secrets; personal addictions; child abuse; unwanted and unexpected marital discord; infidelity; separation and divorce; physical and emotional abandonment. Associated with the losses inherent in private tragedies are the secrets that keep us from truly knowing ourselves, secrets that can often sabotage healthy relationships with others.

We can heal from loss far more effectively than we are led to believe. First we have to make a decision to heal. To assist in dealing with grief and healing, it is essential that we first have an adequate sense of self-esteem. Self-esteem develops when we feel loved, whole and are able to show love in return.

Balance and incorporate simple things into your life. Take time for your life—this is essential for monitoring your own life's pace. Watch out for expectations of perfectionism, not only does it require a lot of energy, it doesn't exist. Learn to cut corners and to devote more attention to those things that are within your capabilities.

When you experience loss and grief, reestablish your self-confidence by remembering past accomplishments with joy--and don't underestimate the power of prayer. When faced with unpleasant tasks at hand, plan to tackle them head on rather than procrastinate. Pacing life will expedite the healing process and help maintain normalcy as much as possible.

If you are at the beginning of the healing process and your life is full of painful emotions, memories or crisis, the idea of healing over time may seem irrelevant. You may feel terrible now and you want to feel better. You may feel desperate and want answers, and most importantly, you just want the pain to go away. Unfortunately, there are no easy answers. Healing does take time. You don't just zip through it. Strong feelings will arise as you work through the grief stages of denial, anger, depression, bargaining, until finally you come to an acceptance that life goes on post-tragedy. There is no magical timetable for healing.

Grieving is a natural part of the healing process. As you shed tears and weave in and out of the stages of grief, you are progressively moving on. A person does not simply "get over" a trauma or tragedy. However, through grieving, it is possible to steadily move toward more inner peace.

If you have difficulty getting in touch with your inner grief, or you cannot seem to justify all the sadness you are feeling, take some time to journal and record your losses. Whatever it is that you are grieving, talk about it, feel it, and know that taking time to mark your losses can provide relief and validation.

It might help to ask yourself some of the following questions--addressing these questions can be a cleansing exercise to assist you in the process of healing:

*"What opportunities were taken away from me"?

*"What dreams and visions have I lost"?

*"What areas of my life are now lacking because of this"?

*"What might my life be like now had this tragedy not occurred"?

The process of healing is different for each of us. It is a very personal experience. We each have our own journey. My journey is not yours, your mother's, your friend's, spouse's, nor anyone else's but my own. And your journey to healing is uniquely your own. There is no good, bad, right or wrong way to work through the journey.

Be mindful that self-love and acceptance is at the core of any healing. The following guidelines can help as you reclaim your life:

1. Allow yourself time to complete the grieving process.
2. Be aware of your feelings on all levels; physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.
3. Bring as much positive energy into all areas of your life, and don't be afraid to reach out and talk about your feelings and emotions.
4. Practice relaxation and incorporate moments of mindful meditation into your daily life.
5. Give yourself breathing space. Slow down and give yourself the necessary time to heal. Remember, you don't "get over" loss, you progressively "move on."
6. Keep a journal of your feelings and what you want for yourself and your life.
7. Ask yourself what your heart and soul wants and what's keeping you from it.
8. Remind yourself that you are in charge of your life at any given time and have a choice to heal or stay wounded.
9. Become aware of any negative attitudes and conscientiously work at letting in some joy and happiness.
10. Remember that you are never alone. Love is everywhere.