

12 Suggestions for Dealing with Grief and Loss

Grieving can be exhausting, surreal, and confusing, leaving us feeling completely lost. We thought we understood grief, but we soon realize we didn't. We did not know it can be so physical and even feel like it will kill us. We did not realize that fear can be more overwhelming than sadness. We did not anticipate that a major loss can make us feel like a stranger in a strange land, cut off from everything that gave us comfort in the past. We simply did not know grief.

Grievers of a major loss often need guidance in finding their way out of the darkness. Here are 12 suggestions to help facilitate your grieving after experiencing a major loss.

Suggestion #1. Be patient with yourself. Grief is disorienting and exhausting, so keep your expectations of yourself realistic.

Suggestion #2. Be gentle with yourself. You have been deeply wounded and will need a compassionate inner voice to help you work through the trauma of major loss.

Suggestion #3. Keep your life as simple as possible. You will be exhausted and in no frame of mind to make major decisions, so don't if you don't have to. Give yourself time to find your equilibrium and re-build your strength.

Suggestion #4. Allow yourself time and space to grieve. In other words, don't pretend you haven't been wounded; instead, find ways to work through the feelings and thoughts triggered by the loss.

Suggestion #5. Develop rituals to facilitate the grieving process: Read about grief, attend a grief support group; journal about your grief; talk with others who have experienced similar losses; or see a grief counselor.

Suggestions #6. But also give yourself permission to set grieving aside for a while. In other words, don't obsess on the loss for any longer than necessary. It's OK to work, laugh, relax, and have fun when you can. You'll definitely need breaks from grieving to recharge your batteries for the difficult work ahead.

Suggestion #7. Seek support from safe people who do not judge you or tell you how to grieve. In fact, you might find support from unexpected acquaintances who quietly emerge from the shadows and know how to listen, most likely because they've suffered a similar loss.

Suggestion #8. Most importantly, accept that your life is going to feel “crazy” or “unreal” for a while. You can't wish the pain away or just “snap out of it.” There are no shortcuts to grieving. You must gradually work through the pain.

Suggestion #9. Have faith that grieving leads to healing. Faith matters because major loss can leave you feeling hopeless. Speaking with others who have experienced a similar loss can offer hope. Educating yourself about grief can help you “trust the process” of grieving when hope seems difficult to find.

Suggestion #10. Have faith that grieving leads to personal growth. The bittersweet truth is that achieving acceptance will make you a wiser person.

Suggestion #11. Try to find meaning in your suffering. As your grieving progresses, try to invest your pain in some meaningful activities, big or small, that honor your loved one, which can transform your suffering into sacred love

Suggestion #12. Self-care is never more important than when grieving a major loss. Thus, when you feel lost and don't know what to do, ask yourself this question: What do I need to do to take care of myself right now? Do you need to eat something, or get some rest, or talk to someone, or take a shower? Whatever you decide you need, do it! Self-care must be your default focus when grieving a loss. People-pleasing will not help.