

Begin where you are...

Many people will read these same words for the same reason you are – looking through the pain of grief and loss in search of comfort. As these words enter your eyes and brain, they will elicit feelings that are specific to you. Some people will respond with tears, and others with great calm. Some will experience difficult feelings that are brand new, while others who have been through this before will be intimately familiar with how grief affects them. Yet as Heraclitus once said, *"No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man."*

Remember that you are unique; so is your loved one and your relationship with him or her. Each particular grief journey takes its own course, challenges us with its own pains and opportunities and can deepen our appreciation of love, resilience, compassion and life itself.

Your grief experience is as unique and individual as you are. Cultures and families may develop shared traditions and patterns for coping with grief, but each individual's experience will ultimately be his or her own.

Most people anticipate emotional reactions after the loss of someone important to them. Feelings such as shock, sadness, helplessness, anger, guilt, numbness and self-blame are common. What surprises many people, however, is how physically demanding grief can be.

Physical grieving may cause headaches, dizziness, exhaustion, muscle aches, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, shaking or oversensitivity to noise. It is important to check any significant changes or physical symptoms with your physician.

Many people describe a period of time, shortly after the death, when nothing seemed real and they felt ungrounded and confused, finding it difficult to concentrate or focus. Some go through a period of feeling very connected to or preoccupied with their deceased loved one – speaking of him or her in idealized ways, spending many hours of many days on pictures and keepsakes, dreaming of him or her or being disconsolate if the dreams don't come.

Any and all of these reactions and experiences make up "grief," the natural and normal reaction to loss.

Allowing yourself to fully experience your grief is the path to healing and to a life that can become joyous and full once again.

Grief does not progress in a linear fashion. There will be setbacks, bad days and triggers that make you feel that you are off track or losing ground. As time passes, your perspective expands: you'll see that you are managing your life in new ways, without your loved one physically present. You are learning that he or she is still a part of who you are and who you will become. ■

Collected Wisdom

When the timing feels right to you, you might be open to support and education by attending one of our groups, workshops or individual counseling sessions. Until then, we offer you what we call “collected wisdom” that has been gathered and intimately shared through the generations by those who have walked the path of loss before us.

1. Seek out a patient, receptive listener – or a few. Telling the story of what has happened, both before and since the loss, is an important part of understanding it and accepting its reality.
2. Focus each day on some way of taking care of yourself: make a plan to have a good, nutritious meal or to get to bed at a reasonable hour; take some time for exercise, even something as simple as a walk around the block; pay attention to your use of alcohol or medication and make sure it's appropriate and well-controlled; think of something to do that feels comforting or kind to yourself, and do it.
3. Practice balance. Take time to allow yourself to grieve, to feel and accept your feelings and to concentrate on acknowledging the changes in your life. Take time as well to reach out to others, to accomplish small tasks (or even one) and to concentrate on something *other* than grief. Whenever possible, be grateful or appreciative of something.
4. Be patient. Remember that grief is a *healing process* that requires time, accommodation and care. It can take longer than most people expect. You will find a way through this loss, and it will be *your way in your time.* ■

Grief & Loss Services

Rainbow Hospice and Palliative Care is committed to offering individual and family counseling, support groups and educational workshops to our hospice families and members of our community.

For more information, to make an appointment or to register for a group, please call Rainbow Grief & Loss Services. We can be reached Monday through Friday, 9:00 to 5:00 p.m. , at 847-653-3141.

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