

Living with Loss: Next Steps

We are so sorry for the loss of your loved one. We hope to help you as you take this first step in your grieving process. This may be helpful to you, either now or in the coming months.

We urge you to find support to help you cope. Our thoughts are with you, your family and friends. We wish you strength and peace in your lives.

Early Grieving

After the death of a loved one, grief tends to be public. Family and friends often come together in this time. Mourning happens as a group through sharing stories at memorial services, or through family bringing food and messages of love to your home.

As this part comes to an end, the reality of your loss often starts to sink in. It is normal to feel distracted during this time. You may find it takes a few days or weeks to begin feeling the deep loss. As others go back to their daily lives, you may feel stuck in this transition.

It is common to feel confused or scared after the death of your loved one. For some time, you may notice a sense of numbness. In a way, this protects your mind until you can cope. Often you are thrown back into your normal routines and not able to focus on the loss. Each day the sun still rises. The world goes on, but you may not feel ready yet.

Emotions of Grief

There is no right way to grieve. Some grieve with sadness and tears, you may not react to the death of a loved one in this way. You might feel overcome and lonely in your thoughts. Try to be kind to yourself in this process of letting go.

People cope in different ways. You might notice this in your own family. One person may be stoic, while another is emotional. Others act as though everything is normal. Respect your loved ones' ways of grieving, even if you do not understand them, and ask them to respect yours.

You may feel afraid to show emotions. If you feel this way, ask yourself why. Some people feel they need to be strong for their children and other loved ones. What would be the worst thing that could happen if you started crying in front of your loved ones? You may be surprised at the relief it could bring for you and for them.

Allow yourself to feel exactly how you feel. Let your emotions and thoughts come naturally. When they come with ease, you can deal with them. If you keep your grief inside, the weight you carry will be greater than the grief alone.

Noticing Changes

Certain parts of your life are now different. Watch for big changes. You may withdraw from family and friends, or have problems at

work. You might feel a negative feeling that you can't escape.

These changes do not happen overnight. The hardest part of this process may be to notice these subtle changes. If others hint that you may have changed, try to be open to their concerns and take an honest look at how you feel.

You are in mourning. The pain you feel for weeks, months, or years is because you have lost someone you love, not because you aren't coping.

Finding Your Way

Grief is a normal feeling that can help you to accept yourself. Being open to your feelings during this time may be hard, but try to see it as a first step in starting to heal. Find a way to heal that fits for you.

You may find it helpful to talk about your feelings. This can be with a close friend, clergy person, or a counselor. While family and friends can be helpful, they may be dealing with their own grief.

Although therapy is not for everyone, trained counselors can offer you a fresh look. You may be surprised at how easy it is to talk with someone who lets you be totally honest without judgment. You might choose to start therapy right away, or wait for some time to pass. See what works for you. If you try therapy and it feels too early, you can wait and try again later.

You don't have to talk about your feelings to grieve. You might choose to keep your emotions private. Try writing down your thoughts and feelings on paper. Seeing your thoughts in front of you helps to separate your feelings from who you are. Your

feelings of sadness or frustration are only one part of you.

The Power of Connection

You may wonder if anyone else has ever had the same worries and feelings. Joining a support group lets you meet people who have felt similar grief. You might find your thoughts and feelings are the same as others. No one has felt exactly how you feel, but when you realize you are not alone, suddenly your mind is not such a mystery. It takes time to understand what your loss means to you. Maybe your emotions do not make sense. Other people farther along in the grief process may have ideas to share about how to put confusing feelings into words. You might feel relieved to know that as strange as your feelings may seem, they are shared by others.

Grief Over Time

Months down the road, if you are asking yourself, "Why haven't I healed yet?" remember the grieving process can be slow. There will be good and bad times along the way. Some days may just be a dull ache and others hit you with the same raw loss you felt on that first day.

Let those painful times be a message. Be kind to yourself on those days. Spend time outside to relax and find peace. Visit a friend who listens to you.

The pain from this death may never fully go away. Over time you will find ways to accept the pain. Your life may never be the same, but you may be able to see your loss in a new way. Your loved one was important to you. Instead of not feeling affected by this loss, your pain shows you how dearly you held this person to your heart.

Keep it Simple

It is natural to worry about what comes next. You may want to return to your old life where it doesn't hurt and you don't feel the loss. It is hard work to process and accept the loss, and move on.

Stay in the moment. Focus on the day in front of you rather than letting your mind wander to the tasks that lie in the future. Be good and fair to yourself. Hold onto hope and trust that things will get better.

Community Resources

Here is a list of resources. These are just some of many groups that exist to help you through losing a loved one. More support can be found in hospitals, hospice centers, funeral homes, or your place of worship. We urge you to find guidance that fits your needs.

United Way 2-1-1

This resource line provides free support and info 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. Call **2-1-1** within Dane County or **608-246-4357** outside of Dane County.

Agrace Grief Support Center

The Fitchburg center offers help to the public through support groups and one-on-one grief support. Call **608-327-7110** or visit www.agrace.org/griefcenter.

Northern Illinois Hospice and Grief Center

Located in Rockford, Illinois. This grief center is for the public and offers support groups for all ages and individual/family counseling, all offered on a sliding fee scale. With questions, call **815-398-0500**, or visit: <http://www.northernillinoishospice.org/grief-healing/>.

The Compassionate Friends

This national group provides grief support to families who have lost a child, at any age and from any cause. Nearby chapters are in Monona, Wausau, Green Bay, Dubuque, Chicago, and others. Most chapters hold monthly meetings. For further questions, call the Madison chapter at **608-836-8998** or visit:

<http://www.tcfmadisonareachapter.com/home.asp>.

Gilda's Club

This national club provides various grief/support groups for persons/families that have felt the loss of someone to cancer. The Middleton location has various groups that meet to provide support for members that have a loss death due to cancer, widow/er group, as well as "Grief Busters" a group for children. For additional information call **608-828-8880** or visit:

<http://www.gildasclubmadison.org/>.

GriefShare

GriefShare is a Christian-based friendly, caring group of people who will walk you through one of life's most trying times. You don't have to go through the grieving process alone. Groups start and end throughout the year. Visit <http://www.griefshare.org/> to locate the different locations where groups are offered.

Modern Widows Club

Serves to empower widows to lean into life, build strength and make a positive change in society. Visit

<https://modernwidowsclub.com/> to locate the different chapters

Survivors of Suicide Services, or S.O.S.

Provides support to people who have been affected by a suicide. Each adult group is helped by a suicide survivor/volunteer and a mental health expert. S.O.S. services are available to any Dane County resident affected by a suicide death, regardless of insurance coverage or ability to pay.

Confidential S.O.S. voicemail:

608-280-2600.

Widows/Widowers Social Group

Through Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, this social group meets once a month. The church also offers free grief counseling classes during the year. To learn more, call **608-271-6633.**

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright ©5/2018. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7363.