

Self-Care in Grief

Although humans grieve in a variety of ways, many experience similar physical, emotional and cognitive reactions to their grief. These symptoms include fatigue, disorientation, forgetfulness, irritability, loss of appetite, insomnia, depression, anger and guilt. While healing from the pain of their loss, many people tend to neglect themselves. They may become isolated and cut off from support that is available to them within the community. Following are a few guidelines on how you can care for yourself (or someone else) who is grieving:

- Accept that the process will take as long as it takes
- Recognize that some things will have to slide for awhile
- Acknowledge that life is now different. However, you do not have to like what is happening now, or “cope well” every day
- Give yourself credit for little victories and small steps
- Know that sometimes you will feel a little crazy, or even act crazy
- Accept your negative emotions (anger, guilt, fear) as part of the “normal” grieving process, but put a limit on negative ruminations
- Try to find something you enjoy each day, and make yourself do it
- Try to limit major changes and decisions for at least a year
- Do something constructive each day, even if it is something small
- Watch your health ... don't neglect the basics
- Tell others how they may help you. Accept that they won't always speak or act appropriately according to your expectations

STRESS REDUCTION TIPS

- Alternate periods of strenuous physical exercise and relaxation in order to alleviate some of your body's physical reactions to stress
- Structure your time and try to keep busy (but don't overdo it)
- You are normal and are having normal reactions to an abnormal event. Do not label yourself as “crazy” or “weak”
- Talk to people; talking can be a healing experience
- Do not try to numb the pain with drugs or alcohol; you do not need to complicate the situation with a substance abuse problem
- Reach out to people; they do care
- Spend time with others
- Keep your life and the lives of your family as normal as possible
- Realize that others are also under stress
- Help your friends and family by sharing feelings and asking how they are doing

- Give yourself permission to feel “rotten” and share your feelings with others
- You can live through this and the intensity of the pain will lessen
- Keep a journal and write your way through sleepless hours—or draw
- Do things that make you feel good
- Make as many daily decisions as you can that will give you a feeling of control over your life, i.e., what to eat, what to wear, what TV programs to watch, etc.