



Senior Series

The Ohio
Department of
Aging



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Surviving the Loss of a Loved One

Each of us at some point will come to terms with losing a cherished family member or friend. Although we all may react to loss in different ways, it is important to allow oneself to mourn.

AARP's publication *On Being Alone* tells us that perhaps the greatest myth about grieving is that it has an end. Mourning doesn't disappear or stop, but it does lessen and become manageable. Even though mourning continues for life, the intensity of grief lessens. A favorite memory, song, place, or holiday may still cause sad feelings, but it should not keep you from living a happy and fulfilling life.

Coping with Loss

When you or someone you know loses a loved one, the American Cancer Society suggests the following to help cope with the loss (Reprinted with permission):

- Give yourself permission to feel the pain and loss.
- Be patient. Don't pressure yourself with unrealistic expectations.
- Accept yourself as you experience your pain, your emotions, your own way of healing, and *your own* timetable.
- Express your feelings and allow yourself to cry. Both are necessary for healing.
- Get support. Talk about your loss, your memories, and shared experiences in the life of your loved one. Do not protect family and friends with your silence. Ask for what you need. Talk to others who have lost a loved one.
- Try to maintain your basic life style. *Avoid making major life changes* (e.g., moving, changing jobs, altering important relationships) within the first year of bereavement. This will allow you to maintain your roots and sense of security.
- Take care of yourself. Eat well. Exercise. Physical activity releases

tension. Allow yourself small physical pleasures that help replenish you, like hot baths, naps, and favorite foods.

- Avoid overindulgence in alcohol. Alcohol is a depressant, and it will only make you feel worse.
- Forgive yourself for doing or saying things in the past. Compassion and forgiveness for yourself and others is important to healing.
- Give yourself a break from grief. Although it is necessary to work through grief, you do not need to constantly focus on it. It is healthy to find appropriate distractions like going to a movie, dinner, or a ball game; reading a good book; listening to music; getting a massage or manicure.
- Prepare for holidays and anniversaries. Decide to continue certain traditions or create new ones. Plan ahead how you want to spend time and with whom. Do something symbolic in memory of your loved one.
- Join a bereavement support group. Others can give encouragement, information, guidance, comfort, practical suggestions, and can help you feel less isolated.

How to Find a Grief Support Group

- Call your telephone operator and ask for the numbers for your local mental health association.
- Use the Yellow Pages and call hospitals and hospices near you, and ask to speak with a Bereavement Coordinator, Social Worker, or Chaplain's Office to get a referral.
- Many hospitals and hospices provide grief support to clients for up to one year following a death and offer groups to the general public.
- Check with local churches.

References

AARP. *On Being Alone*. Retrieved December 2001, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.aarp.org>

American Cancer Society. Retrieved December 2001, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.cancer.org/>

Growth House, Inc. Located in San Francisco, **Growth House, Inc.**, provides information and referral services for agencies working with death and dying issues. Retrieved December 2001, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.growthhouse.org>

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