




**GRIEVING:  
SURVIVING  
TO THRIVING**

**TOUR  
DE  
CURE**



Without question, the loss of someone close to you and dealing with the resultant grief is one of the hardest, most traumatic and emotional experiences that you will experience in life. It's a strange thing to write, but you'll also find it to be an experience that reveals a lot about you and those around you, and it may ultimately leave you personally enriched. Grieving is a process; the early stages are about coping and surviving, but in time you'll move through and reach a stage where you're able to thrive again. Accept that there is no defined path or timescale for this journey – everyone's experience is uniquely personal.

The points discussed in this document are based on personal experiences gathered on individual journeys through the grieving process. The first section focuses on grieving from the perspective of having lost someone close to you, and the second relates to being around someone who is grieving, which for many is a very difficult situation to handle. The hope is that at least some of the points resonate and enable you to navigate your own very personal journey through the process of grieving.

# You're grieving

## HOW TO

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We need to make this clear from the outset - there is no 'right way' to grieve. Grief is a very individual thing, which means that whatever feels right for you at a given time is right for you at that time. Grief changes constantly, and much like riding a bike, coping with grief is a skill you need to learn.

Try to think of grieving as a process: a releasing process, a discovery process and ultimately a healing process.

You need to be open to each phase and recognise that the pain you feel creates space for the long, slow work of healing. Especially in the early stages, grief can feel like a huge hole that you're suddenly plunged into. While this may be the case, in time you'll crawl out of it and learn to walk around the edge without falling in, and even to stand at that edge and look into the hole without fear. You'll learn to deal with your grief. It will happen in the time required for you. There is no time limit and everyone's experience is different.

## THE RIGHT THING

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Just as there's no right way to grieve, there's no right thing to say when you've lost someone close to you. Sometimes you'll want to talk about what happened, and other times you'll just want to forget about it for a while. Just be upfront with yourself and with others about how you feel. Being honest and giving the lead will help remove any potential awkwardness.

## PRACTICAL STUFF

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There is no easy remedy. The death of a loved one brings with it multiple practical considerations. What do I do with their clothes? Bank accounts? Death certificates? Funeral to organise? Do I keep wearing the wedding band? Unfortunately, there's no simple response. If you don't feel strong enough, then get help. Some people like to keep photos, clothes etc around, others like to clean out.

There is no easy or simple answer. It is, however, positive and constructive to think about these things and make decisions. They may change over time, but it is something you can control, something to keep you busy in the early stages of grief.

## HONOUR THE PAST

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Changing what's happened is impossible. Honour the person you've lost. This can be through words, symbols or time. As anniversaries, birthdays and the like pass by, when that dive into sadness comes, take the opportunity to honour the person you have lost. Acknowledge your grief but remember fondly. Over time it may just be a thought, but this thought process may be very therapeutic.

## TALK

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When you're grieving, your emotions are very likely to be all over the place. The important thing is to talk to your friends and family (or a grief counselor) about how you feel, even if you're emotional and even if you feel you're not making sense. Don't worry about it – their job is just to listen!

Sadly, no amount of talking will bring back the person you've lost, but talking will help you to process the raw and negative emotions in your mind. You need to take the lead in this and not worry about protecting your friends and family – they will welcome the honesty, even if they don't quite know what to say.

## KEEP A JOURNAL

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Keeping a personal journal is a safe way to talk. It's a different method of expressing frustration, fear, anxiety, confusion and loss. Articulating thoughts that you sometimes don't have the courage to share with others ... yet. It can also assist you in finding the right words or thought processes when you do share. It doesn't need to be complicated, long or formal. It can be a small entry one day followed by a big one the next, or any combination. You will know when it's right to stop.

## THEY MEAN WELL

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As the bereaved one, talking with others can be very tough. No matter what those around you may have experienced, your grief is your grief and no one can ever really walk in your shoes.

Often people say the daftest things with the best of intentions, like, "You'll get over it and move forward," and they may compare your situation with some other form of loss or separation.

Well, the reality is that you may not get over it, but you WILL learn to live with it. You'll develop a skin with a thickness that enables you to cope. You must also appreciate that most people don't set out to upset you, they simply want to comfort you.

## HELP!

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Going through the process of learning to deal with grief can be an emotional rollercoaster. Try to always remember that you're not alone – there are hands to hold and shoulders to lean on, often from the most unlikely sources. As the bereaved one, your job is to ask for help as and when you need it.

You're not Superman or Wonder Woman, and you're not expected to cope alone.

## SEEK COUNSEL

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Even with the support of friends and family, bereavement will probably leave you in a confused and vulnerable state. If things are difficult then you should seek professional help – counseling is a very effective way to have someone check in on you. They can help you understand that what you're going through is a perfectly normal stage in a difficult process. The Cancer Council provides a free counseling service and your doctor will be able to recommend a good practitioner. It's important that you find someone you feel comfortable with and can relate to. It might not be the first person you see, and this is not a case of you being difficult or because of your grief. It's simply the normal laws of attraction in any relationship.

## DON'T FIGHT IT

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The emotions generated by losing someone are massive and complex. As they surface, the emotions need to be recognised, accepted and released. For men especially, this is not a time for being macho and for hiding emotions. You will feel the emotion, you will feel the urge to cry. Accept it, let it flow and afterwards you will feel emotionally and physically better. No one will think any less of you – in fact, probably quite the opposite. Pain does hold the key to healing, so be sure to sit with it for a while in the space that loss creates. STUGS (Sudden Temporary Upsurges of Grief) is a recognised medical term – don't fight it!

## NOT JUST YOU

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In the initial stages of grieving, it is totally understandable to feel isolated and alone. You may feel that you're the only person going through something like this, and how desperately unfair that is. The reality is that there are many others going through the same thing and feeling the same way as you. The fact that you are not alone in your grief is very sad, but somehow knowing that you're not alone can also be comforting and help to provide a sense of perspective. You may find it comforting to reach out to others in a similar position, in which case you should do so. To be around people who are a little further down the path of grieving may be a positive thing for you. They are doing okay, and therefore so will you ... in time.

## NEVER COMPARE

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Never compare. A wise person once said that you should never compare grief. People react to loss in different ways at different times. Just because your grief appears to be stronger or more visible does not mean that you are grieving more than they are, or vice-versa. Grief is individual; do not be tempted to compare yours with others, or to gauge how you're coping by comparing yourself to someone else. Everyone's journey is different and no one can ever truly understand your situation. We are all very different.

## SPIRITUALITY

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This point is very personal. If you are spiritually inclined then you may find comfort in the church or spiritual groups. You may want to have a special place where you can spend time thinking and relating to your loved one – possibly somewhere you spent time together.

## CLICHÉ TIME

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It won't seem like it initially, but the cliché about time being a great healer is absolutely true. Obviously there's no magic date after which things start to get easier but gradually, as the months and years pass, your loss will become easier to deal with. Losing someone close to you is like losing a limb – you miss it for the rest of your life, but you also learn to live without it. With the passage of time, it becomes much easier to focus on the positive and to leave the difficult memories locked in their box. Loss becomes part of your life story. Your past is interwoven with your present and with your future, and it shapes the person that you are. Do not fight that, it is just the way it is.

## A BETTER YOU

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Finally, one day you may find yourself facing the realisation that you're a better person because of your loss. That is a very strange thing to write, but most would reflect that it's true. In time, you may come to recognise and to be grateful for the positive impact your loss has had on you. Of course you would undo the loss and the hurt if you could, but you can't, so at least try to see one of the very few positive things to come out of it. Going through the process of loss, grieving and rebuilding your life makes you realise just how much you're capable of. It puts trivial things into perspective, helps you seize opportunities, makes you more aware of your emotions, makes you grateful for what you have, and reinforces how fragile and short our lives are. You'll be a more compassionate and understanding person than before, and be very firm in your values and what is truly important to you in life. Ultimately, acceptance of loss and embracing what is left is the only way out of grief.

## TOUCH BASE

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The best thing you can do is to keep in regular contact with the bereaved. Check in with them regularly. Do they need anything doing? Do they want to talk? Would they like to go out? It doesn't have to be much; a quick phone call or a text is enough to let them know you are there and that you care. Recognise and remember that just because they're okay one day or don't need help one week, does not mean that they're okay all the time.

Keep checking in, but don't be overly intrusive. Some people can appear to feed off your grief, which is not helpful.

## TALK

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It can be desperately difficult to be round a friend or relative who has lost someone close to them. Not knowing what to say, witnessing the raw emotion and being unsure of how to help is very challenging, especially as you may be in the process of grieving yourself.

No matter how hard it may be, don't avoid talking just because it's difficult. Given the situation, your job is to be there for the other person. Ask the bereaved person if they'd like to talk about their loved one, and be okay with a yes or a no. One of the frustrations for the recently bereaved is that often people avoid talking because it is difficult and they feel awkward, when actually the bereaved friend or relative may want to talk about how they feel or about their loss.

## SAY WHAT?

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Say what? There is no 'right thing' to say to someone who has just lost someone. Just show up, be yourself and talk naturally. It's not just you; in that situation most people are awkward, clumsy and believe they are saying the wrong thing. The key is to accept that there is no right thing to say. The one thing the other person wants you to say, that you can bring back their partner, you can't do.

# They're grieving





And finally ... a powerful quote from Heidi Postlewaite, a UN peacekeeper who lost her partner:

**You make it through the long weeping nights when the ravens come to scratch at your eyes, and then, one morning after a very long time, you hear a rose bloom and the sun no longer makes you sad. You feel clear and privileged to have shared a life. You take each moment and hold it on your tongue and taste the bitter, the sweet and the sour and know that life is beautiful, and you are grateful for the gift. The long night is over and life starts a new.**

For more information  
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