



Understanding Grief

Grief, with its many ups and downs, lasts far longer than society in general recognizes. Be patient with yourself.

Each person's grief is individual. You and your family will experience it and cope with it differently.

Crying is an acceptable and healthy expression of grief and releases built-up tension for the bereaved person. Cry freely as you feel the need.

Physical reactions to the death of a loved one may include loss of appetite or overeating, and sleeplessness or a change in sleep patterns. The bereaved may find that s/he has very little energy and cannot concentrate. A balanced diet, rest, and moderate exercise are especially important for you at this time.

Avoid the use of drugs and alcohol. Medication should be taken as prescribed by your health care provider.

Friends and relatives may be uncomfortable around you. They want to ease your pain, but don't know how. Take the initiative and help them learn how to be supportive of you. Talk about your loved one so they know this is okay with you.

Whenever possible, put off major decisions such as moving, changing jobs, etc. for at least a year.

Avoid making hasty decisions about your loved one's belongings. Do not allow others to take over or to rush you. You can do it little by little whenever you feel ready.

You may feel at times that you have nothing to live for and may think about a release from this intense pain. Be assured that many bereaved persons feel this way, but that a sense of purpose and meaning does return. The pain does lessen. If you feel this way, do not isolate yourself. Seek out supportive friends or relatives or professional help.



Guilt, real or imagined, is a normal part of grief. It surfaces in thoughts and feelings of “if only”. In order to resolve this guilt, learn to express and share these feelings and learn to forgive yourself.

Anger is another common reaction to loss. Anger, like guilt, needs expression and sharing in a healthy and acceptable way.

Children are often the forgotten grievers within a family. They are experiencing many of the same emotions you are, so share thoughts and tears with them. Though it is a painful time, be sure they feel loved and included.

Holidays and the anniversaries of your loved one’s birth and death can be stressful times. Consider the feelings of the entire family in planning how to spend the day. Allow time and space for your own emotional needs.

A loved one’s death often causes the bereaved to challenge and examine his faith or philosophy of life. Don’t be disturbed if you are questioning old beliefs. Talk about it. For many, faith offers help to accept the unacceptable.

Grief – A Normal and Natural Response to Loss

Starting in childhood, many people have been taught to face life’s crises with a “stiff upper lip”, to “bear up and be strong”. As we are influenced by these subconscious messages, we may become fearful that any show of emotion, particularly tears, might be interpreted by others as a sign of weakness; i.e., “He’s falling apart” or “She’s going to pieces.”

One of the tragedies in our society today is that many bereaved family members and friends experience their grief alone, feeling “There must be something wrong with me.” Fearful of embarrassment, or of appearing “crazy” to others, many bereaved persons hide their true feelings of grief.

It is important for you to realize that what you are experiencing is a normal, natural, and expected response to the loss of a significant person in your life. Your grief reaction may manifest itself in any one or more of the following ways described by other bereaved persons.

“I feel sick to my stomach, I just can’t eat!”

“I have trouble getting to sleep and after I finally do, I only sleep for a few hours before I’m up again.”

Other physical reactions: weakness—pounding and/or heaving feeling in the chest—shortness of breath.

“I can’t seem to get organized. I’m up and down a hundred times during the day—here and there—never accomplishing anything.”

“I keep thinking about how it all happened—over and over again in my mind. I guess I’m trying to make some sense out of it all.”

“I think I’m losing my mind. I can’t concentrate on anything. I can’t even decide what to wear today.”

“Yesterday I heard my loved one call for me in the night, and today I thought I saw him rocking in his chair.”

Other mental manifestations: lack of initiative, forgetfulness, tension and anxiety.



“If only I had told him/her one more time, ‘I love you.’” “He should have gone to the doctor months ago.”

“The nights and weekends are the worst for me—empty and lonely.”

“It’s as if anytime now he’ll call or come walking through the door. I keep thinking of things to tell him.”

Other emotional reactions: feelings of relief, anguish, depression, unexpected and uncontrolled crying.

“I thought this would bring us closer together; instead, we constantly bicker. When I’m feeling up, he’s depressed; and when he’s up, I’m down.”

Other social reactions: tendency to respond to others with anger or irritability—loss of spontaneity.

“If my faith were strong, I would be able to handle this.”

“If I really believed, this wouldn’t have happened.”

Other spiritual reactions: anger with God, doubts about the reality of God’s existence.

Grieving: What You Can Do

1. Feel the feelings: Emotions are normal and healthy; everyone experiences them when grieving.
2. It's okay to feel afraid: Emotions, especially when not expected, can be frightening. Talk to a supportive family member, friend, or counselor.
3. Get angry! Direct your anger in healthy ways. Yell, pound a pillow, run, play a sport. Don't let the anger build.
4. Cry: It's okay to cry. It is even better to have someone to hold you while you cry.
5. Listen to yourself: You will often know what you need. If you are uncertain, then listen to a trusted family member or friend (someone who has your best interest as their first priority) who will help you keep reality in focus. Seek out and talk with others who have experienced a similar loss.
6. Set limits: Don't be afraid to say "no" to yourself or to others. Be gentle with yourself, and don't expect too much of yourself right now.
7. Stay active: Continue to be active; part of taking care of yourself is finding ways to continue with your own life.
8. Write a letter: Keep a journal. By writing your feelings down, it helps you to release whatever you are feeling. Write a letter to the loved one or yourself.
9. Laugh: Life has a way of moving you forward, even when you don't want to. There are still things to be happy about. Each day try to think of several things that make you feel grateful.
10. Reflect: Take some time to reflect on yourself and your loved one and the good times you had together.



11. Your faith: If important to you, find comfort in your religion or spirituality. Talk with a minister, rabbi, clergyperson.
12. Read about grief: So you will know that you are normal!
13. Ask for support: Remember that it feels good to be able to give to someone you care about. Give someone a gift by letting them be there for you.
14. Let people help: Join a support group. Hospice has information on what groups could be helpful for you. Call 315-735-6487 x1214 for more information.
15. BE GOOD TO YOURSELF!

Pay Attention to Yourself

Take a few moments to pay attention to what you are feeling and what you need. Feelings are demanding; if we let them out, they are acknowledged and often go away. If we ignore our feelings, they don't go anywhere; in fact, they often get worse or are expressed as physical pain or illness. Take as good care of yourself as you take care of others.

Ask for help rather than feeling you have to do everything yourself. Don't expect others to read your mind. Tell them specific ways they can help. Recognize that by allowing others to help you, you are giving them a gift. People who care for you want to help; let them.

- ❖ Tell those close to you what helps and what doesn't. If you want to talk about your loved one and hear stories about him/her, then let your friends and family know that so they don't avoid those stories in a misguided effort to spare you the pain.
- ❖ Start a memory book in your loved one's honor and have friends and family write their memories in the book—each memory is a gift to you, a story you may never have heard before.
- ❖ Give a gift or donate time in memory of your loved one.
- ❖ Try to keep to a routine; eat well, keep a regular sleep schedule, get some moderate exercise, take some time each day to just sit and relax. Take medication as prescribed and use alcohol only in moderation.
- ❖ If shopping is hard for you, consider shopping on line or by catalog so you don't have to go into stores.
- ❖ Don't feel guilty if you have fun. Your goal is to keep a balance between grieving and going on with your life.



- ❖ Find a way to remember your loved one that feels right for you and your family. Light a candle or serve your loved one's favorite dish. Copy a photo or engrave an ornament with a favorite saying. Set time aside to give a toast and share memories. Visit and decorate the grave if this would offer you comfort.

Give yourself permission to feel pleasure.

Honor your loved one's memory by

Allowing joy; they would want you to be happy;

It does not diminish your connection to them.



Falling Apart

I seem to be falling apart.

My attention span can be measured in seconds.

My patience in minutes.

I cry at the drop of a hat.

I forget things constantly.

The morning toast burns daily.

I forget to sign the checks.

Half of everything in the house is misplaced.

Feelings of anxiety and restlessness

are my constant companions.

Rainy days seem extra dreary.

Sunny days seem an outrage.

Other people's frustrations seem insignificant.

It has become routine to feel half crazy.

I am normal I am told.

I am a newly grieving person.

-Eloise Cole



Person Asks Online for Advice on How to Deal With Grief

This is one man's reply:

I'm old. What that means is that I've survived (so far) and a lot of people I've known and loved did not. I've lost friends, best friends, acquaintances, co-workers, grandparents, Mom, relatives, teachers, mentors, students, neighbors, and a host of other folks. I have no children, and I can't imagine the pain it must be to lose a child. But here's my two cents.

I wish I could say you get used to people dying. I never did. I don't want to. It tears a hole through me whenever somebody I love dies, no matter the circumstances. But I don't want it to "not matter". I don't want it to be something that just passes. My scars are a testament to the love and the relationship that I had for and with that person. And if the scar is deep, so was the love. So be it. Scars are a testament to life. Scars are a testament that I can love deeply and live deeply and be cut, or even gouged, and that I can heal and continue to live and continue to love. And the scar tissue is stronger than the original flesh ever was. Scars are a testament to life. Scars are ugly only to people who can't see.

As for grief, you'll find it comes in waves. When the ship is first wrecked, you're drowning, with wreckage all around you. Everything floating around you reminds you of the beauty and the magnificence of the ship that was, and is no more. And all you can do is float. You find some piece of the wreckage and you hang on for a while. Maybe it's some physical thing. Maybe it's a happy memory or a photograph. Maybe it's a person who is also floating. For a while, all you can do is float. Stay alive.

In the beginning, the waves are 100 feet tall and crash over you without mercy. They come 10 seconds apart and don't even give you time to catch your breath. All you can do is hang on and float. After a while, maybe weeks, maybe months, you'll find the waves are still 100 feet tall, but they come further apart. When they come, they still wash all over you and wipe you out. But in between, you can breathe, you can function. You never know what's going to trigger the grief. It might be a song, a picture, a street intersection, the smell of a cup of coffee. It can be just about anything . . . and a wave comes crashing. But in between waves, there is life.



Somewhere down the line, and it's different for everybody, you find that the waves are only 80 feet tall. Or 50 feet tall. And while they still come, they come further apart. You can see them coming. An anniversary, a birthday, or Christmas, or landing at O'Hare. You can see it coming, for the most part, and prepare yourself. And when it washes over you, you know that somehow you will, again, come out the other side. Soaking wet, sputtering, still hanging on to some tiny piece of the wreckage, but you'll come out.

Take it from an old guy. The waves never stop coming, and somehow you don't really want them to. But you learn that you'll survive them. And other waves will come. And you'll survive them, too. If you're lucky, you'll have lots of scars from lots of loves. And lots of shipwrecks.

Signs of Healing Grief

A much-asked question by those who are grieving is, “When will my grief end?” Grief does not end, but it gradually changes over time. The change is so gradual that you may not think you are getting better, but you are. We cannot “get over” our grief, but we can learn, grow, and heal from it. Signs of healing are:

- ❖ Your emotions are less intense. It doesn't hurt as much.
- ❖ You're not as sad or depressed as you used to be.
- ❖ It is less painful to talk about your loved one.
- ❖ You can laugh and enjoy yourself without feeling guilty.
- ❖ You have more good days than bad days.
- ❖ The waves of grief are smaller and occur less frequently.
- ❖ You have times when you do not think about your loved one.
- ❖ You can focus on finding new meaning in your life.
- ❖ Your self-esteem is returning.
- ❖ You can engage in old activities or find new activities.
- ❖ You can start thinking about the future with less dread and fear.
- ❖ You have more energy.
- ❖ You can focus on others and reach out to help others.
- ❖ You can acknowledge that you want to get better and know that you can survive.
- ❖ You can embrace your grief rather than fight it.
- ❖ You realize that you are more than your grief—that you have feelings and thoughts separate from your grief. This does not lessen your love for them but can only enhance it.



Fear, Resilience and Things We Cannot Change

Pat Moriarty, MA, FT

In his book, *Five Things We Cannot Change*, David Richo speaks directly to the struggles experienced by many bereaved persons. “There are 5 unavoidable facts of life built right into the very nature of things, over which we are powerless,” he states:

Everything changes and ends.

Things do not always go according to plan.

Life is not always fair.

Pain is a part of life.

People are not loyal and loving all the time.

When we resist the reality of these basic truths, we encase ourselves in disappointment, frustration and sorrow. After a death, how often do we feel or think those very things: “It’s not fair that my husband died within months of our planned retirement together!” “Why did it have to be my mother that died? It’s too painful living without her.” Whether death is sudden or follows a long terminal disease, the truth of the 5 unavoidable facts becomes glaringly apparent to a bereaved person. Everything has changed and there are many painful endings that are neither fair nor planned. Bereavement is not for the faint of heart!

When in grief, we need to remind ourselves that humans are resilient. We are “hard-wired” to survive the upheaval and anguish of grief. Over the ages, humans have adapted new ways of being in the world. We can do this.

Resilience is not something we either have or we don’t; it’s something we learn and cultivate within ourselves. American Psychological Association offers a brochure, *The Road to Resilience*, which details ways to build resilience. These include:



Make connections to others.

Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems.

Accept that change is part of living.

Move toward your goals.

Take decisive actions.

Look for opportunities for self-discovery.

Nurture a positive view of yourself.

Keep things in perspective.

Maintain a hopeful outlook.

Take care of yourself.

Another resource is Susan Jeffers' book, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*. Fear can immobilize us under the best of circumstances. In grief, there are many potential difficulties: a man who suddenly finds himself responsible for making financial decisions after a lifetime of deferring to his spouse, a person whose partner had the role of "social butterfly" who now feels isolated and alone, or the young person who needs to get a real job following the death of a very generous parent. The title itself, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*, serves as a push through the avoidance that stymies a much-needed action.



I Never Thought Grief Could Teach Me So Much

It is good to grow wise by sorrow.
Aeschylus

At the beginning of our grieving process, we think only about getting through it, surviving the loss of our loved one, and coming out of the experience in one piece without giving up or going crazy. We don't think grief can teach us anything. We don't know or care that it will be a silent educator. That is the last thing on our minds. But then it happens.

One of the most crucial things we learn is that we have resources within ourselves that we didn't know existed. These resources, once tapped, serve us well throughout the rest of our lives.

We survivors also develop a unique wisdom that comes only as a result of loss. We recognize this in one another as we talk in support groups, meet randomly in social situations, or work side by side. We find it difficult to define this "survivors' wisdom" except to say that it has to do with valuing the very essence of life, of having a clearer understanding of life's purpose. And once gained, this is a knowledge no survivor would wish to discard even if it were possible to do so.

↪ Going through this loss is one of the most difficult things I will ever do. It is one of the most instructive. I have learned lessons about myself and the way I think and act that have been invaluable. I have discovered that I have strength and patience and perseverance. I know that I possess a source of wisdom that will be with me for the rest of my life and upon which I can draw whenever I wish.

Finding Balance in Grief

By Kenneth Doka

I am worried about my mother. Ever since Dad died, she hardly ever seems to go out anymore. She sits in the apartment all the time. Whenever I suggest a shopping trip, she claims she is not in the “mood”. Shouldn’t she go out more?

My sister-in-law’s behavior concerns me. Ever since my brother died, she is never home. She constantly is on the run—going from one place to another. The house is in disarray, as she never has time to clean it. She says she cannot be alone with her memories. Is she simply running away from grief?

Two comments—both from concerned relatives—illustrate many of the problems that we may experience when we grieve.

Both comments highlight the dilemma that we often face in grief. We receive so much advice, often contradictory, from those around us. Clean out the closets—No, leave them. Express your feelings, but be strong. Sometimes we just never know what we are supposed to do or how we are expected to feel. We may feel that no matter what we do in our grief, someone will be displeased or give us a disapproving glance.

These comments also point to a real problem we may experience as we grieve, finding a sense of balance. Grief is an individual occurrence as we all are unique and our losses are different. This is no “one size fits all” solution. Yet, as we face questions about how we deal with grief, it is useful to consider the question of balance.

We all need time alone even as we should spend time with others. We need to spend time with our grief even as we require respite. Each of our equations—how much time alone and how much time with others—is individual.

Begin by looking at past patterns. Were we loners or people who always wanted to be with others? Before our loss, did we spend a lot of time being inactive or were we always on the move? Generally, there is less reason for concern when our present patterns are aligned with our past.



How have we dealt with loss before? Did we go into a cocoon—emerging into activity later? Were we always in motion as we faced losses past? And did these patterns work for us? Would we wish we handled it differently as we look back? Again, patterns that worked in the past remain guides for the present.

How do we spend time—either alone or with others? Do we stay at home sulking, depressed and miserable? Or is the time mixed—sometimes mourning our loss, others in doing the work that needs to be done? When we are together with others, are we focused only on our own pain, or clearly avoiding grief or memories, or mixing moments of grief with times of sharing and periods of respite? Even in our activity alone or with others, there is value in balance.

There are no easy answers to the questions posed above. That should not surprise us. There are no easy formulas—just questions that guide our journey.

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The Myth of Closure

By Ashley Davis Prend, ACSW

Grievers often ask, “When will I begin to feel better? When will I return to normal? When will I achieve some closure?”

Closure, our culture tells us, will bring about a tidy ending, a sense of completion. Some grievers hope that the desired magical closure will occur after the funeral or memorial service. Others are confident it will come once they have cleared out their loved one’s room. Or maybe after a special personal ritual. Or perhaps after the first anniversary comes and goes, “Surely then, we will have closure,” we think. We pray.

The reason we long for closure, of course, is because we would like to neatly seal away all of this pain. We would like to close all of the sad, confused, desperate, angry feelings out of our life. We would like to put all of this behind us.

Closure. What an odd concept, really, as if we could truly close the door on pain—turn the lock and throw away the key. The truth is far more complex, of course.

Closure is for business deals. Closure is for real estate transactions. Closure is not for feelings or for people we love.

Closure simply does not exist emotionally, not in a pure sense. We cannot close the door on the past as if it didn’t exist because after losing someone dear to us, we never forget that person or the love we shared. And in some ways, we never entirely get over the loss. We learn to live with the loss, to integrate it into our new identity.

Imagine if we really could end this chapter in our life, completely. It would mean losing our memories, our connections to those we love. If we really found closure, it would ironically hurt even more because the attachment would be severed. And this attachment is vital to us—the memories are treasures to be held close, not closed out.

Perhaps it is better to think in terms of healing. Yes, we can process our pain and move to deeper and deeper levels of healing. Yes, we can find ways to move on and channel our pain into productive activities. Yes, we can even learn to smile again and laugh again and love again.

But let’s not ever think that we’ll close the door completely on what this loss means, for if we did that, we would unwittingly close the door on all the love that we shared. And that would truly be a loss too terrible to bear.

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Take Your Moment

Take your moment to mourn, but don't spend too much time.
My life was a wonderful celebration.
I am still with you and love you, but now you must seek me in different ways.

Learn to:

See my face in the beauty of the world
and hear my laughter in the giggle of a small child.
Feel my touch in the warmth of the sun,
and my voice in the gentle stirring of the wind,
and most of all, know that I am present to you always
in the quiet strength of our love for each other.

If you feel burdened with the problems of the day,
or fear the uncertainty of the future,
seek me in the wisdom and counsel of family and friends.
If you feel the pain of loneliness or the hurt of separation,
reach out to someone else in need of love,
for that is how you will quiet your sorrow.
And if you seek peace for yourself,
listen quietly to the sound of my voice present in your own heart,
for that is where I am always.

Were not our lives together more joy than sorrow;
more laughter than tears; more forgiveness than separation?
So, too, let this experience of life be turned from grief and sadness
to one of knowing and seeking the loving God within us all.

When you choose to remember our time together,
remember the days of celebration and laughter.
In this way the gift of my life and the power of its love
will continue to echo in the lives of all you touch.

Some Facts of Life after a Death

1. People want you to be “fine”, not unhappy.
2. It is a couples society.
3. Tears come unbidden; grief comes in waves.
4. You may feel you are going crazy, but probably you are grieving normally.
5. Health care providers often want to help you by giving you medication.
6. Finances change, often for the worse.
7. Some friends and acquaintances drift away; others you were not close to may become closer because of their experiences with grief.
8. Skills you have not needed to use need to be reawakened.
9. You may feel anger, and you may feel guilty about the anger. Try to separate realistic from unrealistic guilt and allow healthy outlets for your anger.
10. Faith may become stronger and may become shaky.
11. People do not know what to say to you.
12. Widowers often form new relationships and marry soon. Widows usually do not.
13. Sex is a problem.
14. You may feel vulnerable—to scams, to car mechanics, to financial advisors . . .
15. You feel incomplete. Something is missing.
16. There are whys, if onlys, and woulda, coulda, shouldas. Let them in—and let them go.
17. People may avoid talking about your loved one to “spare you pain”. You need to tell them you welcome their memories.
18. Chronic health problems flare up. Exhaustion is normal.
19. People will want to give you advice and tell you what to do.
20. Relationships change.



Don't Tell Me...

Unknown Author

Don't tell me that you understand; don't tell me that you know.

Don't tell me that I will survive, how I will surely grow.

Don't tell me this is just a test, that I am truly blessed.

That I am chosen for this task, apart from all the rest.

Don't come at me with answers that can only come from me.

Don't tell me how my grief will pass, that I will soon be free.

Don't stand in pious judgment of the bonds I must untie.

Don't tell me how to suffer, don't tell me how to cry.

My life is filled with selfishness, my pain is all I see.

But I need you, I need your love, unconditionally.

Accept me in my ups and downs, I need someone to share.

Just hold my hand and let me cry and say. "My friend, I really do care."



Someone I Love Just Died, So...

- ❖ Please listen to me.
- ❖ Don't tell me to get over it; I won't. I will get through it, but not over it.
- ❖ Don't ask me to put a time limit on my grief. Recovery will take me years.
- ❖ Anger, guilt, confusion, and forgetfulness are common. I am not crazy.
- ❖ Don't feel sorry for me.
- ❖ I'm going to be angry. This is part of my process. Don't tell me not to be angry.
- ❖ Let me cry; it is part of my healing; it's healthy for me.
- ❖ Don't dance around the subject. Bring it up to me. I need to talk.
- ❖ I will have setbacks. My emotions, at times, will hit like a tidal wave. Don't panic.
- ❖ Know that my feelings are overwhelming, and these feelings are normal.
- ❖ Don't tell me how I should feel.
- ❖ Allow me to set my own limits and boundaries. I will be forgetful and confused. It is part of my grief process.
- ❖ If you cannot be kind to me, please leave me alone.
- ❖ I will need space. Please respect that. I will never be the same.
- ❖ Accepting me as I am is the greatest support you can offer me.
- ❖ Don't ask me to make any major decisions for a while.
- ❖ I am learning how to live again. I am trying to accept what happened to me, and I am willing to
- ❖ generate possibilities through tragedy.

Author: Anonymous

Grieving the Difficult Relationship

Most grief books help you mourn the loss of a loved one, how to cope with yearning, how to adapt to the emptiness following the death of someone so significant in your life that the mere thought of living without them feels incredibly overwhelming and incapacitating. But, where are the resources for those who had a conflicted relationship? Where is the book on “Things I *Really* Wanted to Say, But Couldn’t, During the Eulogy”? There are very few, if any.

Not every relationship is that smooth or free of conflict. Many people have mixed feelings about the person that they lost. Many children have been repeatedly disappointed by their parents or caregivers in more ways than they can count.

It is human to feel ambivalent. The people that we lose often had very human problems—addictions, incarceration, gambling, infidelity. These problems are real and are prevalent, yet the unwritten rule of grief is “You don’t speak ill of the dead.”

However, if you can’t speak about it, where does it go? The body remembers everything. Consequently, any unfinished anger or unresolved issues remain with the living, which often impede the natural healing. Excessive amounts of time and energy are spent trying to redo conversations once had, create the statements that were never voiced, or imagine reactions never received. These are heavy bricks to carry for endless days, months, or even years.

Adults have extreme difficulty with guilt for even having the “ambivalent” feelings. Children have an even tougher time with them as it is confusing to have two directly opposing feelings towards a person that was significant in their lives.

None of us do very well with incongruence. So our inclination is to swallow it, hide it away, and hope that it will one day disappear on its own.

Allow yourself the opportunity to name and label these differing emotions. Take inventory of the entire relationship. Help children have a chance to talk. Ask what they miss about the person; also ask what they don’t miss. Permission to have these mixed feelings is crucial. There are no perfect relationships.



Unfortunately, conflicted relationships can often leave much private pain in their wake following a death. It can be more challenging to grieve, since there is little room/sanctioning to discuss the not-so-pleasant memories of the time you had with your family member.

Invite the feelings about conflicted emotions, invite discussions with others about them. For it is the unsaid stories that do the most damage. It truly is okay to love someone, but still be angry at them. It is okay to love someone, but not like (or even hate) their choices or decisions. You are not wrong to feel conflicted.



I had my own notion of grief.

*I thought it was the sad time that followed the death of
someone you love, and you had to push through it to
get to the other side.*

But I'm learning that there is no other side.

*But rather, there is absorption,
adjustment,
acceptance.*

*And grief is not something you complete,
but rather, you endure.*

*Grief is not a task you finish
and move on,
but an element of yourself—
an alteration of your being,
a new way of seeing,
a new definition of self.*



An Affirmation for Those Who Have Lost

By James E. Miller

I believe there is no denying it—it hurts to lose.
It hurts to lose a cherished relationship with another,
or a significant part of one's own self.
It can hurt to lose that which has united one with the past
or that which has beckoned one into the future.
It is painful to feel diminished or abandoned,
to be left behind or left alone.
Yet, I believe there is more to losing than just the hurt and the pain.
For there are other experiences that loss can call forth.
I believe that courage often appears,
however quietly it is expressed,
however easily it goes unnoticed by others—
the courage to be strong enough to surrender,
the fortitude to be firm enough to be flexible.
I believe a time of loss can be a time of learning unlike any other,
and that it can teach some of life's most valuable lessons.
In the act of losing, there is something to be found.
In the act of letting go, there is something to be grasped.
In the act of saying "goodbye", there is a "hello" to be heard.
For I believe living with loss is about beginnings as well as endings.
And grieving is a matter of life more than death.
And growing is a matter of mind and heart and soul more than of body.
And loving is a matter of eternity more than of time.
Finally, I believe in the promising paradoxes of loss.

In the midst of darkness, there can come great Light.
At the bottom of despair, there can appear a great Hope.
And deep within loneliness, there can dwell a great Love.
I believe these things because others have shown the way—
others who have lost and have then grown through their losing,
others who have suffered and then found new meaning.
So I know I am not alone—
I am accompanied, day after night, night after day.