

Never Let Go

How to Hang On to Hope When Mourning

By Lou LaGrand

Does everything look hopeless? No future? No place to turn for the help you really need deep within? Is there anything that can make a difference in the way you feel? Despite the image and meaning you carry right now when you see the word hope, trust the following: It is a sure-fire way out of your emptiness and despair. You simply need to turn it on.

Hope is often considered to be a will-of-the-wisp, an often talked about, but hardly practical factor in dealing with the various problems of life. This belief is spawned by the fact that hope is little understood, and it seems to work best when you don't realize it is behind your positive behavior.

So what can you do to generate hope, keep it alive, and use it in dealing with your great loss? Consider the following.

1. Start the process of building and maintaining hope by never forgetting the following advice from William James, the eminent psychologist, professor, and author: "The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another." Paste his quote where you will see it often. What you think is the cornerstone of hope.
2. Hope is first and always a choice. We all forget that thoughts are extremely powerful in the way they affect the mind and the body. Right now, make the decision to choose one hopeful thought. Here it is: I am starting the process of getting through the darkest night of my soul. You don't have to know how at this moment, only that you are intent to be on the move through it. Keep saying to yourself that you will prevail.
3. You can start generating hope right now by seeking connections. There isn't a psychiatrist alive today who would not tell you how critical it is to find connections in your life, especially at this time of loss. Make every effort to be with the most loving people you know; they are filled with hope. Go to them if they are unable to come to you. Their presence alone will be a hidden source of hope that on an unconscious level will help you immensely.
4. Hope is all about possibilities. No matter what the nature of your great loss, there are always possibilities for dealing with it and sources to tap into for the information needed. You can uncover many possibilities by finding a quiet place and writing them down as you examine alternatives. You will find even more by doing the same thing with a best friend, a counselor or a clergy person. The possibilities are always out there; finding them is the work of grief. And it is fueled by hope. Keep making a pervasive search.
5. You will also find hope in one of the least suspected places--a grief support group. It takes courage to come to a support group. Once there, you find others with similar struggles. Your hope level rises as you see them confronting their pain and gaining. You will feel a palpable hope emerging when, after four or five meetings, members begin to ask if anyone in the group would like to go to dinner after the meeting. A bond has been formed and hope is the hidden motivator.
6. An infinite source of hope is another connection: your awareness of and belief in a power greater than the self. You may call this your Higher Power, God, Allah, the Almighty, the Absolute, the Great Spirit, or the Universal Source. However you view this Power, it is an eternal connection to hope. It is there for you to turn to and ask for wisdom and strength, even if you have been lax in your commitments.

This Power is always with you, in the darkest of nights, and especially if your spiritual progress has been slow. It may also manifest in a vision, a sense of divine presence, or an Extraordinary Experience involving your deceased loved one.

Hope requires practice if it is to provide its fruits in time of great need. Therefore, you must take action and reach out to connect whenever you sense that hopelessness is creeping into your life, especially at this difficult time of loss. And then make the search for hope come full circle. Review each day how you are progressing in loving, serving, being kind, and strengthening the connections to your social network. All of these will instill hope in your life as you cope with your loss.