

How to Reinvest in Life After the Death of a Loved One

By Lou LaGrand

Death often appears to wreck the lives of survivors. Many people feel they have a gaping hole in their body and mind. With the loved one gone, life takes on some drastic changes and demands that the survivor start new routines without the support and companionship of the beloved. It seems like hell on earth.

So what do mourners seem to accomplish that helps them accept their great losses and begin the long journey of adapting to a new life? How do they adjust to the unfamiliar and begin to find joy once again? Here is what many have done to move through, not around, their grief.

1. At some point, they chose to commit to the following approach: "I am adjusting to the new. I am going to get through this." They made up their minds that they had to change and accept the loss. Intention is an extremely powerful force. Make every effort to begin each day with a commitment to meet your sadness head on and embrace it as a natural response because you have loved. Put something on your night stand (object, symbol, whatever is meaningful to you) as a reminder when you get up in the morning to form the intention and tell yourself, "I am persisting. I will outlast this."
2. Work on your inner life. All grief resolution begins with what you say to yourself day after day, week after week. This means you have to be your own best friend and treat yourself as you would a best friend. Come to the realization that what you continue to think about grows. As you keep focusing on pain it often gets worse, depression comes and deepens. Learn a technique to allow yourself to switch your attention away from pain and towards a loving memory. Everyone needs a break from grief. Keep talking positively to yourself and draw on your spiritual beliefs for wisdom and strength.
3. Make the decision that you will talk to at least three people every day. Human interaction, with the right people, and at the right time will go a long way toward balancing your sadness and providing a needed outlet for your feelings. On the other hand, isolation from others will lengthen the acute pain phase of grief. Never stay by yourself for long periods of time. Yes, you need solitude, but not self-imposed isolation.
4. Come to the conclusion that there are two options open to you when a loved one dies: to live in abject sorrow for the rest of your life (which will paralyze you for the rest of your life) or to accept what cannot be changed, search for meaning in the death, and find new purpose in life. Obviously, this process of awareness cannot take place right away. Much time is needed to assimilate the pain. More time is needed to become familiar with a world that has drastically changed, and to realize that death and struggle changes the survivor. Eventually though, you have to choose one or the other path.
5. Listen to others; learn about grief, and the fact that it is survivable. We can all learn from the information that is already out there and has been used by millions through the years. And yes, there are still lots of people who cling to nonfunctional myths and beliefs about grief who have to be avoided as much as possible. Look for quality sources by checking their credentials and the resources on which they draw their wisdom.
6. Go easy on yourself when you have a bad day. Most mourners have bad days after experiencing a number of tolerable ones. Months later, you may feel the way you did the first few days after your loved one died. There is one word that has a wide range of application in the grief response: normal. We are all different and grieve differently, so don't expect some sort of perfection. Nobody grieves in some perfect format. It doesn't exist.

Remember, grief does not vanish completely, never to be heard from again. Memory will bring back some sadness from time to time and we learn to live with it. You will too. Your beloved will always be a part of you.

If it was a parent who died, you have their genes in you, and your memory can always recall them--and you can choose to talk with them as you see fit. This is healthy as you move on into the next phase of your life. Sure, the painful hole won't go away but look around you for inspiration from all who are living proof that you can live with that reminder.

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