

How to Deal with Your Anger When Mourning

By Lou LaGrand

Is the anger over the way your loved one was treated by the medical community eating you up? Or, are you angry at those who should have helped you in the last days of your loved one's life, but were nowhere to be found? How can you reduce the intensity of your anger and then let it go? There are many possibilities that have worked for others, and they can work for you.

Mourners can be angry at the funeral director, friends or neighbors, the clergy, the deceased, and even the self. Sometimes anger is fully justified. Often, it is part of a complex web of previous experiences in life. In any event, it can be dealt with.

Face your anger because, whether fully recognized--or camouflaged in sarcasm, intolerance, jealousy, withdrawal, or fear--it takes a severe physical as well as emotional toll on the body. Here are several approaches to consider.

1. Don't suppress your anger. Tell someone you trust about it. Choosing to keep it within is not only physically damaging but finding a suitable way to gradually release its energy is a primary objective. Talking about it is a beginning. Suppression can do nothing but build your inner rage.
2. Remember that anger is a normal human response. You are not unusual nor should you feel you are a bad person in any way if you are angry. So don't put yourself down.
3. Don't feed your anger. There is one surefire way to keep your anger burning and taking its deadly toll: keep playing it over and over again in your mind and keep repeating the worst of the causes to yourself. Change your angry self-talk by substituting an image where you feel connected and loved.
4. Feel it gently. Ask yourself why you are holding on to it so tightly. If you let go of it, is there anything you will lose or have to give up? Are you using anger as a way to cover up fear? Is it directed at or due to the excessive dependency you had on the deceased--and that's why it is difficult for you to talk about it? Do you feel deserted or abandoned?
5. Uncover the true cause of your anger. This is especially important because often you can find a reason to forgive. For example, realizing human weakness and reasoning as to why certain things were said or done, can be useful. You could be angry at your own lack of control over the situation and/or your dependency. And, it may mean forgiving yourself. Also, there could be more than one cause and you need to address each.
6. Talk to your Higher Power about what you are feeling. In your belief system you can be sure that your Higher Power can fully understand and your faith can lead you to doing the right thing to ease your feelings. Meditate on whether you have any responsibility for the cause of your anger. Ask yourself "What needs to be restored or protected for me to let it go." Then listen.
7. Create the intention of working out your anger. Some form of appropriate expression will be helpful. One universal mode is exercise, which can positively affect your immune system. Choose a form you like with the intent of reducing the intensity of feelings. Say to yourself, "Release, I want to slowly release these feelings so I don't pay a heavy physical and emotional price." Look at your anger as a form of energy to use in building something good. It may also help to write about it, then burn, throw, or let go of the anger in some symbolic way.
8. Make forgiveness a goal. The wisdom of almost any tradition you study says this about anger: in the final analysis, the person who is angry always suffers more than the object of anger. Forgiveness is a gift you give yourself as you let yourself out of a self-made prison. It demands courage and more than saying "I forgive" because it takes much longer for that statement to ring true in your heart.

In summary, keep the focus on self-care and what letting go of anger will do for you and those you associate with. Moving past it is a choice. Make every effort not to see yourself as a victim which will hurt even more and isolate. You can deal with your anger by finding the right person to companion you through it. Don't hesitate to seek a professional to help you sort it out.