

THOUGHTS FOR THE BEREAVED

Bereavement brings raw pain, disbelief, reality and many other deep emotions - many of us have never experienced or at least not to the same depth. The time period after the first year is usually not quite as pain filled as all the first were. Although we may be a little better, often we are not nearly as healed as we would like. It helps to understand this next period and to learn some skills for coping. It is most helpful if we lower our expectations of ourselves, work on our grief and hold on to HOPE. Remember, grief is different for everyone. It is like fingerprints or snowflakes, no two are alike. Everyone grieves differently, so don't compare yourself to others or place yourself on a timetable. Some of the following suggestions/observations may help you:

1. Be aware of becoming critical of ourselves, either consciously or unconsciously due to unrealistic expectations.
2. A different level of reality may hit us. We usually no longer deny the death, but now face the reality and its long run implications.
3. If death is unexpected, some say that the second year is even more difficult.
4. It may be the time to struggle with new life patterns. We may have handled grief by overactivity (workaholic etc.). If our previous style of grieving has not been helpful, we must be willing to try new approaches such as: Read about grief and bereavement; develop coping skills; become determined not to become stuck in our grief; do our grief work; HOLD on to HOPE.
5. It is important to find friend (s) with whom we may talk. This is the one significant factor that prevents people from sliding into deep depression.
6. We should carefully consider the phases of grief. (Sub) consciously one or more phases may giving us trouble such as anger/guilt. If so, recognize the phase and work on it. Don't push it down or ignore it.
7. Other events in your life may also be grief situations (trouble with spouse, children, work, other family members, friends). Realize this happens to many grieving people and it does complicate your grief.
8. You may or may not cry as often, but when you do, realize it is therapeutic. Don't fight the tears. As the author Jean G. Jones says in Time Out For Grief, "cry when you have to - laugh when you can."
9. Physical symptoms may become more acute (stomach disorders, headaches, sleeplessness). Have a checkup.
10. Insufficient sleep plagues many bereaved. It may be helpful to give up all caffeine (colas, coffee, tea, anacin, etc.). Beware of alcohol which is a depressant. Some findings indicate that alcohol causes insomnia. Physical exercise helps to relax and tire one. Often bereaved awaken very early, or during the middle of the night. Sometimes it helps to go to bed earlier.
11. Check frequently that you have balance in your life - - rest, read, recreation (including exercise), prayer and work.
12. Depression may enter your life again or for the first time. Coping with depression is very

difficult. Again we need determination, understanding friend(s) and possibly the help of a professional counselor if our depression is deep and long.

13. Our grief may seem "out of control". We may feel as if "we are going crazy". This is common to bereaved people. It is important to realize grief work takes time. Much more time than we think it should. Be patient with yourself.
14. Be aware of a lowered self-esteem. On a scale of 100, the average person's self-esteem is in the 70's - the bereaved person's is in the teens. Just knowing this fact helps a little. We might think to ourselves, "I don't like the person I've become." Often it is our unrealistic expectations of ourselves to be handling our grief better-to be "back like it was." Life will never be the same, but we can eventually learn to love and appreciate life and those in our life in a special way.
15. We often hear "time will heal". Yes, time does soften the hurt a bit, but mainly it is what we do with time, (read, talk, struggle with the phases, get some help when we become stuck in a phase, be gently with ourselves, lower our expectations, build a pleasant time with family and friends).
16. It helps to consider that our loved ones are happy-free of pain and hassles-that we will be together again. Also if you died, would you want your loved ones to mourn deeply the rest of their lives? You would want them to enjoy life as much as possible. They want this for you.
17. Pride may be one of your greatest stumbling blocks. You may think that you should be doing much better-you may not want to acknowledge that you need help.
18. Vibes from friends may openly or subconsciously be "Shape up-you must be over it by now. Get on with living," etc. You not only experience the death of a loved one, but you feel abandoned by friends and even family. Find others to talk with who understand.
19. Loneliness may seem to engulf us as we look ahead to a life without our loved one. Again finding new friends, worthwhile work, connecting with friends from the past, etc. Pleasant memories can help too.
20. If you feel guilty, it must be acknowledged-not pushed down. Really look at the "if onlys." Hopefully YOU and only you will be able to say to yourself, "I did the best I could at the time-so did my loved one."
21. Why????? If the "why" is bothering you, ask it again and again until you can come to terms with it. You may never know why. It may remain a mystery that you choose to let go. When you can, concentrate on your choice to get better.
22. Realize that anger may be at ourselves, God, the person who died, those in the helping professions who did not seem to understand or help. Acknowledging our anger is the first step in releasing its power over us.
23. Don't expect too much of your family. They too, have their hands full of grief.
24. Consider even though we are struggling with grief, I think we would rather have had the time with our loved one than not to have had them in our lives at all.
25. Set realistic goals for the future-realistic is the key word. Pin point your most acute concern. Think of all possible solutions. Choose one solution at a time and implement it.
26. So many of us have been brought up to be independent, "I'm going to handle this grief myself." We find it difficult to ask for help. Yet we need help. Asking for help from caring people can make a big difference in you working through your grief. Force yourself to reach out for help.

27. Often, when we slide back into the pits, we panic. We hate the feeling. Irrationally we feel that we will remain there. It is important to realize we have been in the pits before (and will be again) but we will get better.
28. Be a "fighter" against giving up and becoming stuck in grief as 15% do. A determination to work through grief may be one of the common denominators of those who recover.
29. Remember, we had no choice when our loved one died, it was out of our control. But we do have a choice in healing ourselves. It may be the hardest work we will ever have to perform.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patty Robertson".

Patty Robertson, BSW, LSW
Bereavement Coordinator