

CorsoCare Hospice Bereavement Program

Four Steps of Grieving

- STEP 1** To Accept the Reality of the Loss
Believe the death really happened.
- STEP 2** To Experience the Pain of Grief
Be willing to feel and experience pain.
- STEP 3** To Adjust to Your Life Without Your Loved One
Adjust to the changes brought about by death.
- STEP 4** Investing in a Different Life Without Your Loved One
Putting your love—and memories of your loved one—in a “special place” in your heart. Begin to enjoy new experiences and a different, renewed you.

Excerpted from: Worden, J.W. (1991).
“Grief Counseling & Grief Therapy: A handbook for the mental health practitioner.”
Second edition. New York: Springer Publishing Company.

STEP 1 – Accept the Reality of the Loss

It is sometimes difficult to accept the fact that your loved one has died. You may find yourself searching faces at the mall (seeing someone from a distance that looks like your loved one) or hearing people talking that sound like your loved one. You will be constantly reminding yourself that your loved one is dead.

It takes time and energy to come to terms with the fact that your loved one died and will not be back. It is something you know in your head, but maybe not yet in your heart. There will be times when you catch yourself saying, “Oh wait, I can’t call him. How could I possibly forget that he died?”

But it is possible to forget—at least for a few moments.

Rituals, funerals, and memorial services are good ways in which we grieve our losses and come closer to accepting death.

You may find yourself having intense feelings during this grieving process. Some of these feelings were sent to you in the first mailing.

Take time for yourself to express your emotions and cope with your feelings. Sometimes it may be helpful to remind yourself that the grieving process is not something you have to do all by yourself. There are people to support you, so don’t leave out your family and friends. And seek professional counseling if you feel the need to do so. It is a real sign of great emotional strength to be able to ask for help.

Many bereaved persons have stated that grief is a process that takes a lot of courage, hard work, and “stick-to-itiveness.”

STEP 2 – To Experience the Pain of Grief

The pain referred to in Step 2 is not only physical pain, but also emotional and behavioral pain. Since everyone grieves differently, you may have different kinds of pain. Some people are uncomfortable being with someone who is going through the grief process. It is important, though, to find someone who will be supportive of you. You cannot go over, under, or around grief—because it will eventually catch up with you. In order to feel better, you have to feel the pain of grief, and sometimes that is difficult.

It may be helpful to hear this: Feelings are just that: feelings. There are no good or bad feelings. You may find people judging you or you may judge yourself, thinking you “should” feel better by now. Grieving requires you to experience the intense feelings of human hurt. That is hard to do.

Try to imagine yourself being a small child who feels everything very intensely and without any masks or “covers.” You need to allow yourself to comfort your raw pain the same way you would a little child. You deserve kindness, reassurance, tolerance, and time to grieve.

STEP 3 – Adjust to Your Life Without Your Loved One

This step sometimes takes widows and widowers quite some time to complete. It is hard to come to terms with living alone, possibly raising children alone, and also managing finances alone. Many people also face new domestic tasks, like cleaning and cooking, that they’ve never handled before. Learning so many new tasks can be overwhelming. You are also learning to be comfortable with a “new self” that may be very different than your old self with your loved one.

Many bereaved persons experience feeling low self-esteem during the grieving process. You may perceive yourself as helpless, inadequate, and incapable. The world may look very scary. You may have new and different interests that family and friends do not understand.

You may have a fear of new and different experiences, thinking that those experiences mean forgetting your loved one. It may not feel right to go on to do new and exciting activities that your loved one will not be a part of. This can cause bereaved persons to get stuck in the grief process.

It is important to know that you will get past the pain and come to a new and different sense of being. Trying new activities does not mean you do not remember your loved one. There comes a time when you will see the light at the end of the tunnel and feel as though things may get better.

STEP 4 – Investing in a Different Life Without Your Loved One

This step is misunderstood to mean that life now goes on and the bereaved must forget about the deceased and think about a new life without their loved one. However, it is important to know that you never lose your memories of a significant relationship. What you should do is find a “special place” for your loved one that will allow you to live effectively in the world. Sometimes this step is described as having a special place in your heart for your loved one. This special place is where you can go to be with your loved one for awhile and then leave the special place and go on with life—probably going in a new and different direction than before your loved one died.

Some bereaved persons find this step very difficult to go through. When this step is complete, you will be able to live life and enjoy new experiences with your special love—and your memories together—tucked inside your special place.

When all the steps are complete, you have regained an interest in life, feel more hopeful, and are able to adapt to new roles. The sense of loss is never completely gone, but is an important part of the renewed you.

Many times, you will jump back and forth from one step to another, but moving forward to eventually complete all the work that needs to be done is important to properly heal.