

For people who have walked through the death of a loved one, they may feel that after the first few months, they can begin to move on with their feelings and emotions. However, they will soon find themselves grieving as they did before because the feelings of loss are still present in their life.

Friends of the grieving person will assume that the survivor is moving on with his or her life and putting the past behind. No one can gauge how another person will feel. It is probable that the survivor will feel and react much as he or she did in the previous months. Remember that time does not heal all things; time only passes. Nothing has changed from before. Because of these feelings and a survivor's need to move on, some of the following ideas or suggestions may help.

- 1** Meet personally with a trusted family member, friend, or counselor, who understands how you are feeling. This should be a person who will primarily "listen" to you, not be an advice-giver. Share with this person how you are currently feeling. Share how you would like to feel and what you would really be capable of doing at the present time. Ask this person to help you to be accountable for several "small" goals or changes. You can give him or her permission to call you occasionally, or you can plan a weekly phone call to report on your activities. This relationship cannot be one where you call that person every day at all hours. This needs to be a healthy relationship, and because you as a survivor are so needy at this time, it is best to ask your confidant to set the limits.
- 2** Be good to yourself. Be kind in your thoughts about yourself. If you have guilt or regrets about your loved one, make a list of what God says about you according to the Bible. Remember, He is a loving, forgiving, redeeming God. When Jesus has redeemed you, you can be assured that God has lifted the guilt and regrets from you. It just takes time to embrace His love and to feel His presence. Each day, sit down and invite Jesus to come with His peace and His presence. Ask Him to fill your home with His presence. Sit for ten minutes, close your eyes, and let Him love you and speak to you.

As you do this regularly every day, you will begin to sense and understand His presence. When you have difficulty falling asleep, ask Him to come with His peace and presence. Memorize the 23rd Psalm, and repeat the verses as you fall asleep. You will begin to experience His presence in your life day by day. Try to take a short walk each day; go out on your patio and just watch the birds and the clouds in the sky. Let God's creation minister to you. Eat three meals a day; take your vitamins and whatever else your medical doctor advises. This is not the time to be "brave" and make it on your own. You can't! If possible, take a short nap in the afternoon. It's okay to take a nap. If you work, use your break time to find a place to just rest for fifteen minutes quietly.

Allow others to do things for you. Let friends help you with housecleaning, ironing, bringing in meals, shopping, and doing errands. Most of all, be sure to do what you feel like doing. If you are not feeling like a movie or a picnic, tell your friend no. You do not have to keep busy to be better; you have to be rested and even enjoy solitude.

3 The time will soon come when you feel compelled—or will have family or friends encourage you—to clean out that loved one's closet or room. Others will even offer to help you. You need to consider your own feelings at this time. If you are in a situation that does not involve the sale of a home or a move, then look at the big picture and get in touch with how you feel about sorting out possessions. You may be ready to tackle this now. However, most people need a lot more time. The comfort of a child's room with his or her clothes and toys can be very healing to families. The presence of a husband or wife's clothes in the closet, along with the scents and smells of that person, can be comforting to a survivor. Your only enemy at this time will be the person or persons who pressure you to "get on with your life." Remember who you are and how you feel! If you are the least bit resistant to change at this time, put the job on hold. **KEEPING LOVED ONE'S POSSESSIONS IN THEIR PLACE IS NOT A DETRIMENT TO HEALING!**

Everyone grieves differently and heals in different ways. God will give you the grace and peace to do the job when the right time comes. And when that time comes, you will find joy in your memories of that special person.

4 Now is a good time to begin a journal, if you have not already done so, to record your feelings and daily walk. Just a few words or sentences will help you each day. Writing a letter to the person you have lost also helps. You can say things that you didn't have time to say before. You can express your feelings of loss, anger, guilt, or love. Visiting the cemetery can help a lot. Children especially can participate in taking flowers or small mementos to the graveside. This is a touch point for you and your loved ones. It is not wrong to visit the cemetery on a regular basis. Some people will go every day for the first few months or even a year. We all know our loved one is with the Lord and not at the cemetery, but the gravesite gives us a place of remembrance of his or her life. Enjoy remembering this special life!

5 Be careful about how quickly you involve yourself in activities again. You are the one who needs to sit down and set some goals and priorities for your future. Previously, you may have been active in clubs, groups, etc., but now you will find yourself less interested or more fatigued, and not enjoy the functions. It is okay for you to set aside activities at this time. Fatigue is not a friend to the grieving. It leads to physical problems later on. Don't allow yourself to be busy out of a need to hurry up the grieving process. The time will come when you will enjoy many of the activities you previously found satisfying and possibly many new interests. Set small goals to begin with and then build on them depending upon your energy level.

6 Finally, if you have been part of a family unit that is grieving the loss of a child, sibling, parent, spouse, etc., it is a good time to observe and discuss with them how everyone is doing. Remember no one, especially the mom, is responsible for how everyone is grieving. But each adult person needs to be aware of how the children are functioning. When a child withdraws from family discussions of the loved one, when a child is spending too much time alone, when a child is not eating, sleeping, or is irritable all the time, then adults need to plug in to how that child is grieving. All too often parents overlook even the youngest child and how he or she is functioning. Usually the child is afraid, has questions about death and heaven, and feels his or her tears will upset others. This is a time to sit down and talk as a family. If the adults are unsure of how to help a child, then it is important to get counseling help. A child's questions need to be answered and assurance given that his or her response to the loss is okay.

Remember most of all: no one grieves the same! No certain way or set pattern of grieving is the best way to grieve. Respect the individuality of each person. There is no right or wrong way to grieve!

The process of grief will be different in each person. Seeking help and counsel will bring healing. When grief produces a threat of danger to an individual's life, then immediate steps need to be taken to provide professional help for that person.

by Judy Hawk