

40 ways to help yourself when grieving

1. **Take time to grieve.** The only way to get to the other side of grief is to walk through it. Unfortunately, we can't go around it. The most important thing in grief is to express any feelings you have. Try not to "stuff" emotions.
2. **Be aware of how the grief is treating you. These are normal reactions of grief:**

What are some common symptoms of grief?

<u>Physical</u>	<u>Mental</u>	<u>Emotional</u>
Fatigue	Feeling numb	Irritability
Thirst	Unable to concentrate	Isolating from others
Diarrhea	Anger	Loneliness
Being hoarse	Sadness	Restless
Sighing	Depression	Apathy
Body/head pains	Anxiety	Guilt
Dizziness	Suspicion/Paranoia	Relief
Sleep problems	Confusion	
Change in appetite	Memory loss	
Crying		
Heartburn		
Increased alcohol use		
Misuse of medications		
Change in sex drive		
Nausea		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oxygen intake is off in body• Increased acid in muscles of body		

3. **Talk.** You deserve to express yourself at this difficult time, even though others may discourage or even reprimand you for having strong emotional reactions. Talk about your loved one or animal to others who truly listen to you. If they are uncomfortable, gently let them know that part of your healing process is getting things off your chest.
4. **Write.** Start or continue writing in a journal or diary. Buy a special book for this purpose only and express yourself by recording feelings and releasing grief. It is secret, safe and healing. Keep track of how your feelings change at each anniversary. You may also want to compose a letter to your loved one to describe how you feel and 'say' things you never got to say. Some questions to consider: How would you spend the rest of your life if you only had a short time to live? Would you say or do things differently? or If you had never had this loved one in your life, how would your life had been different? Be as honest as possible about how you feel.
5. **Create.** You may want to create a special collage or other artistically-inspired memento about your loved one or animal, like a scrapbook. For those who are beginner artists, you can use memorabilia items or something symbolic like seashells. In the process, your thoughts and feelings may become clearer as you provide a creative outlet for expression.
6. **Remember.** Reflect on your special person. Looking back, what do you appreciate about his or her contributions to your life? What are the moments together that you cherish the most?

7. **Rest/sleep.** Be patient and gentle with yourself. It is not uncommon to feel sick and absolutely drained for the first year or so after a death. Do not rush decisions or allow others to do so for you. Slow down and take your time to adjust to your new situation. A regular sleep routine will be of benefit. If you are tired during the day, rest. Cutting down on caffeine, alcohol, and smoking will help too. Meditation, perhaps in the form of prayer or yoga, can help you get rest too. Make sure your family doctor knows what has happened so he or she can help monitor your health.
8. **Exercise regularly.** If you are physically able, take a brisk walk in the morning or at lunchtime. Whether you like it or not, get some sort of physical exercise every day.
9. **Eat well.** Even if it's the furthest thing from your mind, pay attention to the quality of what you eat. Take the time to eat small, nutritious meals while sitting down.
10. **Have some down time or fun.** Is there a book that you have wanted to read or a movie you haven't had time to see or a place you've always wanted to go? This is the time to do it. Whether it's listening to uplifting music or watching a comedy, do something that makes you laugh WITHOUT feeling guilty. Humor, smiling and laughter is a GOOD thing in grief. It does not mean you loved your special person any less if you laugh after their death.
11. **Forgive.** The death of a special person or pet or another big type of loss may bring an end to the physical opportunity to communicate, but you may still need to ask forgiveness from them. You may also need to forgive someone for a past hurt—and forgive yourself if need be. Let yourself off the hook now and apply the energy that was tied into that and put it into something positive.
12. **Plan ahead for special days.** Anniversaries and holidays bring their own particular challenges in grief. You may feel especially emotional throughout the year as special days arise. Attending an event such as a graduation, wedding, or funeral can be highly charged as well. This is a completely normal reaction. In order to prepare, talk to other members of your family to find out what their expectations are. Decide together how you would like to change your traditions while honoring the memory of your loved one. Do what will make you feel the most comfortable and always have a backup plan and exit plan in place.
13. **Get the support you need.** There are people who want to help you get through this time—friends, loved ones, support groups, clergy, bereavement counselors, trained laypersons, and professionals. Often people want to help, but don't know what to do. Accept help that feels good to you. Tell people who want to help how they can best help you – they do want to help, but can't read your mind.
14. **Read books or articles of the process of grief** so you can identify what's normal now and what is not. Go to the library and get an armload of books. Read ones in which you feel the author "is speaking to you" and return the others. Grief books do not need to be read cover to cover. Look for a book with a detailed table of contents that will enable you to select certain parts as you need them.
15. **Crying is good.** The tears you shed while sad are made up of different components than the tears you cry from physical pain. Sad tears carry poisons that need to be released out of your body and muscles. Crying is GOOD for you.
16. **Reward yourself.** Give yourself rewards along this heart-wrenching journey you are on. You need something to look forward to. Look for small ways to pamper yourself, such as a trip, a bubble bath, a new tool, soft pajamas, a good meal, a piece of jewelry, new clothes, or a makeover.
17. **Carry a special letter, poem, or quote** with you to read when the going gets tough. Or, carry some special belonging to your loved one with you at all times. These are called linking objects and they are an important part of feeling connected to our special person and healing.

18. **Communicate with others as honestly as you can.** People cannot read your mind so they may not know when they have offended you. Tell them gently about what is helpful to you and what is not helpful. Many times they need to be educated on grief and what you are going through.
19. **Be aware that every person grieves differently.** No two people ever grieve the same way. Some people may cry a lot, some never cry. Some people talk a lot, some never talk. Give yourself the permission to feel what you feel. Only you know what is best for you. Grief must be worked through at your own pace and schedule.
20. **Try and be sensitive to the needs of your partner and family.** By reviewing past losses or deaths together, you can understand how you and your partner may react to this death. Avoid competition in who is hurting most and seek professional help if you are blaming one another for the death. Each person will have difficult issues to cope with. Consult each other regarding birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries. It is a mistake to hope the holidays or other special days will slip by unnoticed. Make plans and discuss them. Give each other a break in the house department as well. The dishes may not get done or the yard may not be mown as regularly as before and that's okay.
21. **Consider the "gender" differences.** Men and women grieve differently. Some people are more comfortable expressing their emotions while others are not. Some people need to return to work and to keep busy while others prefer to withdraw and focus fully on grieving. Both ways are okay as long as you take the time to grieve when you need to. Follow what your body tells you to do in grief – rest, cry, grieve, withdraw, be social, laugh... whatever it may be.
22. **Get away if that will help you.** Take a short trip to "re-group." When a special person or animal has died, it is very important to process the loss and get used to your new identity, routine, and family structure. Getting away from the telephone for a few hours or days can be helpful.
23. **Realize that grief is not a one-time process to go through and then you're done.** It can take up to seven years to function normally after a death/loss. Grief can come in waves on and off for the rest of your life. We have things called grief triggers that remind us of our grief even years after a death: smells, sounds, sights, music, clothing, cars, friends, etc. -- and they can bring memories back quickly. This serves as a reminder to us that the heart has not forgotten your loved one and it never will.
24. **You may lose some friends now...** Sometimes the people you thought could and would help you the most disappear when you are grieving and people you never thought of to help you are the most helpful. Grief teaches us who our "true grief friends" are in a big hurry and sometimes it rearranges your address book. This is very normal although it can be very hurtful.
25. **This death may remind you of past deaths and losses,** and bring those memories back vividly. Many times you may have to complete grieving for a previous loss first before you can fully grieve this loss.
26. **This death may make you question everything in your life... and that's okay.** You may question your spirituality, God, marriage, parenting skills, ability to love, self-esteem, how you were raised, job, career, beauty, etc. This is very normal and shows you are trying to make sense of the world and gain some control back.
27. **Grief is a battle between the head and the heart.** The head knows what happened with this death but your heart does not always want to accept what your head knows. You feel grief when your heart realizes what your head already knows. When your head and your heart meet "on the same page" you may realize some of your major grieving may be done.
28. **Helping others** has been proven to be very helpful within five years after a death. Consider volunteering at a hospital, animal/food shelter, school, library, senior citizens center, etc. if you have the time.

29. **Staying busy** with hobbies or volunteering and/or returning to work is one thing that can help many people in grief. Staying busy can distract us from our grief and as long as it does not allow us to deny the death too long, it is a healthy thing to do.
30. **Take care of yourself** by seeing your doctor and dentist regularly, especially within six months after a death. Many times people have small problems that they had before the death that can get much worse after a death. For instance, a small cut can turn into a big infection due to a grieving person's suppressed immune system not allowing the body the heal as well as it did before the death.
31. **Consider professional massage, facials, pedicures or manicures.** Grieving people may miss being touched by people and massage is one very healthy way to be touched and improve circulation. Also, massage take toxins out of your body much like crying does. It is a wonderful gift to give yourself or a grieving person.
32. **Talk to whomever you need to get answers about this death including doctors, police, witnesses, friends, etc.** The more answers you get now, the faster your grief process will go. You may never get all the answers you need after a death, but if you work on getting the most answers you can, you are helping your mind to understand this death.
33. **Create a memory book or box** that contains special items belonging to your loved one or that remind you of your special person or animal. You can decorate it on the outside and inside with special items that hold good memories.
34. **Don't allow others to forget about your special person or animal.** Establish donations or memorials. Set his or her picture out. Say a poem at holiday time. Many others will not talk about your person or animal until you do. Donate a gift or give money to an organization your special person or animal believed in. Plant a tree or flowers in his or her name. By planting a tree or flowers, you show that growth of these items is a symbol of the continuation of life and its many cycles. Offer a scholarship in your special person's name. See the joy it brings as each year a student receives a scholarship in your loved one's name. Make sure the recipient knows the history of the person and scholarship too.
35. **Consider what your loved one would have wanted from his or her future.** Is there a way to honor that now? What would he or she want for your life? How would knowing the answers change your life now?
36. **Consider buying a very special candle for your person or animal** and light it at a table or in a window during your memory times or even on a daily basis. This is symbolic of love's light continuing.
37. **Have a quilt or bear made** from old clothing belonging to your special person.
38. **For Christmas:** Stocking: hang one up for your loved one or animal and have everyone write a special memory or note and put it inside. You can read them with everyone there or later when they are gone. For ornaments: Buy a Christmas ornament each year to remember your special person or animal.
39. **Have a gathering of friends or loved ones and do something special and different to honor loved ones who have died.** Have a potluck and you can all bring your loved ones' favorite food and share memories.
40. **Be aware that fear, depression and anxiety can be NORMAL in grief.** If you need to take medications for these conditions, it's okay. You need to do what you need to do to keep on living.