

NIU EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
815-753-9191

Grief Journey Tips

Grief is a normal response to any loss. Each person's grief journey is unique, yet the process of grief is similar regardless of what was lost: a loved one, a relationship, your health or your loved one's health, your home, your identity/role related to family or job, your income and/or your hopes and dreams. The intensity of your grief is directly related to the strength of your attachment to what was lost.

Recognize your loss: After a significant loss, you may be numb for awhile. Being numb allows us to accept the loss a little at a time. It is important to acknowledge the loss and the pain.

Be with the pain: You are hurting. Admit it. Feeling the pain after a loss is a normal part of living and loving. Denying the loss does not lessen the pain, it prolongs the suffering.

Accept all of your feelings, even the feelings you don't like. Fear, anger, guilt, sadness, depression, despair, heartbreak, and an overwhelming feeling of disorganization are characteristic reactions to a significant loss. Avoiding your feelings, means your feelings will be expressed in unexpected ways. See "*What Helps You Cope With Grief*" by the NIU Employee Assistance Program.

It is okay to feel anger: Everyone feels angry at a significant loss. Channel it wisely and it will go away as you heal. Walk, run, and exercise. If you find yourself more irritable, journal and explore what your anger is about. Anger is also a way for some people to avoid feeling the more vulnerable feeling of sadness.

You are vulnerable, be gentle with yourself: Invite help only from people who you know will be gentle with your feelings and can accept all of your feelings.

You are not alone, seek comfort as you need it: Although you feel alone (grieving is an individual process), you are not alone. Grieving is a sad part of life that everyone experiences. Accept support from others. Let them know what they can do to help. Do not expect comfort from a grieving partner as he/she may not be able to give you what you need due to their pain. *Weekends and Holidays can be very hard. Make plans with others.*

Suicidal thoughts are a symptom of your pain: Sometimes people feel survivor guilt or that they wish they had died instead of their loved one. The NIU Employee Assistance Program (815-753-9191) is here to assist as is DeKalb County Hospice (815-756-3000). If your thoughts of dying persist and you feel they are out of control, SEEK HELP AT ONCE by going to your local emergency room.

Healing does not occur on a timetable: Healing occurs in phases where you move in and out of different feelings. Remind yourself that you can get through this. If it feels like you have been there long enough remember there is no way around grieving. You can only accept where you are in each moment and continue on your journey. To understand the phases of grief, read "*What Helps You Cope With Grief*" on our webpage.

Heal at your own pace: Never compare yourself to another grieving person. Each of us has our own timing. Most grief ebbs and flows over a 2-3 year period with more non grieving days as you get into the second year. The intensity of the grieving days also fluctuates, so just accept where you are. See "*Stepping Stones along your Grief Journey after the Death of a Loved One*" on the NIU Employee Assistance Program webpage.

Expect relapses: There will always be certain things that trigger sadness again. This is normal.

Do Your Mourning Now: Allow yourself to be with your pain-it will pass sooner.
Postponed grief will return later.

Keep a journal: Putting your thoughts and feelings on paper is a good way to get them out and both understand them and let them go. You can also look back and see where you have been, how you dealt with it, and get an idea as to where you are headed.

Take good care of you: See NIU Employee Assistance Program's "*Tips for Taking Care of Yourself During Stressful Times*" on our webpage.

Explore your beliefs: Clarify what is important to you...what brings you meaning. Reaffirm and explore your faith, spirituality, and values. This is a time for you to Grow.

You are a beautiful, worthwhile person: You are much more than the emotional emptiness you are now experiencing.

Give yourself praise and praise everything you do small or big: When you do something hard, pat yourself on the back. Give yourself credit. Today, maybe it is just that you got out of bed and got dressed. Praise yourself, today it was hard. Every day you do new things, get through difficult things, and make hard decisions so give yourself praise. You can count on yourself. You are courageous even though you may not feel it.

You will grow: As you work through your sadness you will learn that you can survive. The pain eventually lessens – healing does occur. You may begin to understand that change and separation are a natural part of life. You are a better person for having loved.

BELIEVE: You are all the beautiful, wonderful things you ever were with new dimensions added. You are richer, deeper, wiser, softer, more compassionate, and more caring. Believe in your ability to survive, to heal, to change, and to grow.

Be open: Give yourself opportunities to meet new people, places, ideas, experiences, but do not forget to build on the past. Do not throw out what has been worthwhile to you. Small changes are best at first.

Begin to look to the future: Begin to try new activities – new ways of filling the day and finding new meaning. Some will not be right for you, but some will be perfect and open new opportunities. All you need to do is explore the possibilities.

Begin to give of yourself: When you are ready, giving can bring you the greatest joy. It is one of the best ways of healing yourself after you have felt your pain, sadness, and anger.

Tips for Coping:

- **Physical exercise along with progressive relaxation will improve sleep and concentration.**
- **Keep a journal: write through your sleeplessness and change the ending of your nightmares.**
- **Talk to people; talking is one of the most healing activities. It is how we let go of stress.**
- **Give yourself permission to feel rotten and have a grieving day. Remember on these days to share your feelings with others.**
- **Resist the temptation to isolate yourself. Spend some time with others.**
- **Give yourself permission to escape from your new reality and have moments of happiness.**
- **Get plenty of rest and eat regular meals even if you don't feel like it.**

Readings

It may be affirming to read what others say about how they experience grief. For a listing of books on grief, check out www.compassionbooks.com or the NIU Employee Assistance Program website reading list at the end of the article "*What Helps You Cope with Grief*". You may also contact the Employee Assistance Program.