

Grief and Self-Care

“You, yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection.” -Buddha

As becomes clear to many people who experience loss, grief is not a single emotion but rather a process involving a wide range of emotions. Despite some similarities in how humans grieve, no two people will experience grief in exactly the same way. As a result, grief can be an isolating experience. It is common for those in grief to cut themselves off from their support systems. While grieving it can also be difficult for people to recognize and tend to their own needs. The following are some simple suggestions to encourage self-awareness and self-care while grieving:

1) Accept your feelings.

This can prove challenging, as it is not uncommon for us to avoid painful emotions or criticize ourselves for our feelings. There is no right way to feel while grieving. What is important is to acknowledge the feelings, make space for them, and accept them as part of the healing process.

2) Cut yourself some slack.

It is easy to get down on yourself when the grief process is taking longer than you would like. The process will take as long as it takes. Criticizing yourself for not bouncing back to “normal” will not change that. Give yourself a break. Accept that it will take time and don’t hesitate to remind those around you of the same.

3) Do at least two things each day: something constructive and something you enjoy.

Don’t overwhelm yourself with long to-do lists. Pick one or two constructive tasks each day to complete. Find something you enjoy, however small, and set time for it in your day. At the end of the day take a few moments to reflect on the things you’ve accomplished.

4) Remember the basics: sleep and diet.

It is easy to neglect these essential needs while working through grief. Make a conscious effort to eat regular, balanced meals. Find a healthy sleep schedule. If you are having serious problems with sleep or diet see your physician.

5) Be aware of the stories you’re telling yourself.

We often tell ourselves stories about our own lives. In periods of grief these stories may be untrue, but as we repeat them internally we become consumed by them. They can include the “I’ll never get over this” story, the “my life is over” story, and the “it isn’t even worth trying” story, among many others. Allowing ourselves to be defined by these stories can paralyze us from moving forward. Whenever one of these stories arises be conscious of it, remind yourself of why it is not true, and let it go.

6) Ask for help.

Grief can feel extremely isolating, but the reality is often that there are many people around you who want to help but don’t know how. Seek out those who want to provide support and tell them what you need.

Though grief is a normal process, this does not mean you have to work through it alone. Beyond friends and family there are grief groups, bereavement counselors, and spiritual leaders who can support you through the process. For a list of grief resources contact the Family Services Department at 410-242-7000.