

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, stands in a field of bright green grass. Her arms are raised high, and she has a serene expression. The background is a bright blue sky with soft, wispy clouds. The overall mood is one of hope and renewal.

How to

HEAL YOUR GRIEF

& Move on with
Your Life

KAREN MEHRINGER, MA

How to Heal Your Grief and Move on with Your Life

A Free Special Report by Karen Mehringer, MA

“The soul would have no rainbow had the eyes no tears.” – John Cheney, Poet

This special report is designed to give you insight and understanding about the grieving process and why it is so important to honor it. You will learn practical suggestions you can apply today to help you heal your grief, so you can experience more joy, vitality and purpose in your life. Although the suggestions offered are aimed at healing grief related to the death of a loved one, many of them also apply to any major loss such as that resulting from illness, divorce, miscarriage, or job lay-off. So, no matter what your loss, this report will benefit you. If after reading this report and trying some of the suggestions you need additional assistance, Karen is available for grief counseling. More information about her services is provided at the end as well as a list of helpful resources.

C.S. Lewis has written that bereavement is a universal and integral part of our experience of love. We all experience it at some point in our lives. It is a normal process following the death of a loved one or any major loss. But, when we are in the middle of it, grief can seem overwhelming and unnatural. Feelings such as sadness, anger, guilt, regret and confusion may arise. Whether we had time to prepare for our loss or whether it was sudden, it is always a shock. Our world is turned upside down and we begin to question, “What is the point of it all?”

Grief in response to loss can manifest in many ways. Physically, you may experience symptoms such as shortness of breath, digestive ailments, fatigue, decreased appetite, insomnia, and soreness of the body. Emotionally, you may experience disorganization, fear, anxiety, powerlessness, hostility, blaming, forgetfulness, depression, loneliness and lowered self-esteem. You may become socially withdrawn and lack initiative and interest. Further, spiritually, you may feel disconnected and question your beliefs. These symptoms are all normal.

Psychologist William Worden, PhD suggests that the grief healing process involves mastering tasks. These tasks do not follow a linear process but are mastered over time. They happen

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simultaneously although you may feel one task more pronounced than the others at certain times. The “Tasks of Grief” are:

1. **Accept the reality of the death.** We understand and accept that the deceased person is no longer alive and won't be a part of our everyday lives.
2. **Experience the pain of grief.** We may experience a variety of intense feelings and begin to work through them as part of the grieving process.
3. **Adjust to the changes in the family and to the environment in which the deceased is no longer a part.** We may struggle with all of the changes that happen as a result of the person being gone, including all of the practical parts of daily living and all of the effects their loss has upon our sense of who we are and how we see the world.
4. **Reinvest energy in life, loosen ties to the deceased and forge a new type of relationship with them based on memory, spirit and love.** We begin to acknowledge the value of the relationship we had with the person who died and everything we may have learned or loved or respected or disagreed with about them. We recognize that we don't need to forget them and it is okay to care for and connect with other people and continue to live our lives even though we miss them.

Although there are identified tasks to be mastered, the healing process is different for each individual. It happens in its own time and its own way depending on several factors such as your relationship to the deceased and the circumstances surrounding your loss, as well as your perception of grief and whether you see it as a negative experience or a normal part of life.

Unfortunately, our fast-paced society today does not honor the normal course of mourning and emphasizes we need to “get over it.” Most people feel that they need to move on with their lives shortly after the memorial. We are taught that we need to be positive and think happy thoughts in order to manifest the life or our dreams. The pressure is on for us to heal quickly and to have a positive attitude.

This way of being doesn't honor what actually is. Nor does it honor the richness of our experience and the personal growth that can come out of it if we take the time to go through the natural grieving process. Thus, we live in a continual state of resistance to what is, wishing we were feeling differently than we do. As a result, our feelings of grief continue to be submerged and rejected instead of expressed and healed. Our state of resistance keeps us feeling dissatisfied and unfulfilled.

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Further, when we don't honor our grief, it can fester inside our bodies causing illness and disease, as well as a lack of vitality. Substance abuse and addictive behaviors like over eating, eating unhealthy comfort foods, or spending hours in front of the TV, are often related to some type of unresolved grief. Thus, tired and numbed out, we aren't living fully. We exist with our music still inside of us instead of fully expressing who we are and our brilliance.

In order to move on with our lives, we need to continue to make room for grief to be expressed. The following are suggestions to help you with your healing process and thus open you to the life you were meant to live.

Feel your feelings. Put your to do list aside, slow down and listen. It can be challenging to slow down, go within and listen as our painful feelings surface. For many, this is scary and uncomfortable. Therefore, we tend to keep ourselves busy and distracted so we don't have to feel our grief. By ignoring it though, it doesn't just go away. As mentioned above, it can lead to feelings of dissatisfaction or even physical illness.

Meditation and journaling are tools to help with the process of listening and getting in touch with your feelings. Using a combination of both can be very powerful. I recommend journaling daily about what you are feeling and experiencing for at least ten minutes. To help you get started, use the following prompts, "What I really lost is... What I have left is...What may be possible for me now is..." Write from your heart without stopping. Then, sit quietly for another ten minutes with your eyes closed and your mind focused. After meditating, continue to journal if more thoughts and feelings come into your awareness.

Another way to access your grief is to watch a sad movie. Make sure to have a box of tissue nearby and really let your emotions flow during the sad parts without stuffing them in.

You may feel like an emotional roller coaster as you go through the grieving process. One moment you might feel light, joyful and happy, the next you may experience intense sadness. This is normal. The more you allow yourself to feel your grief in these moments, the more you will be able to access your joy.

Engage in activities that keep you in the present moment. Grief turns our world upside down and throws us off our center. It is common to feel ungrounded when going through the grieving process. For example, you might frequently find yourself driving to a destination and later wondering how you

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got there. Feeling spacey and fuzzy headed is another common symptom. Therefore, it is important to do activities that help us stay centered in the here and now.

For example, moving your body will help you to feel more relaxed, centered and grounded. There are many ways to move such as walking, running, dancing, hiking, biking, swimming, golfing, surfing, or doing yoga, tai chi or qi gong. Choose movements that feel good and refreshing, but don't cause you to over-extend yourself. After a major loss, not only do you need time to heal emotionally, but your body needs time to heal as well.

Activities like painting, gardening, knitting...engaging in a hobby you love, can also help with staying in the present moment. Many of these activities are offered as adult education classes at your local community college. Make a commitment and sign up for a class.

It is common to feel easily overwhelmed and over-stimulated after a major loss so it is important to spend quality time in nature away from noise and people. This will also help you to feel more grounded and centered.

Create art. Draw, collage, paint or mould an image of your favorite memory of your loved one or an aspect of them that you miss the most. You can also draw or paint your emotional experience of loss. Art helps us to get out of our heads, into our hearts and more grounded in our bodies.

Get in touch with where grief lives in your body. Sit in a quiet place where you won't be distracted and focus on your breathing. Imagine bringing in more peace and calm with each inhalation and exhaling any tension or negativity you may be feeling. With each breath, become more and more fully present within your body. Notice areas that feel tense or constricted and send your breath there allowing them to soften, relax and release. Then, ask the question, "Where does grief live in my body?"

You may hear an answer, have a knowing, or simply feel something like a lump, pain or sensation. Listen carefully. Next, after locating the area, focus your attention on what the energy feels like. Does it have a size, shape, color or texture? What would you name it? Pretend it is sitting right in front of you and have a conversation with it. What would you say? What would it say back to you? Ask why it is there and what you need to know to help it transform. After the meditation, write about your experience.

Write a letter to grief. After the above meditation, you should have a good idea about what grief looks like and feels like as an emotion that inhabits your being. Write a letter to this emotion

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expressing how it has affected your life and what you want and need from it. Allow it to respond back to you. What does it need from you to continue to heal?

Write a letter to your deceased loved one. In the letter share about how their death has affected you. Say what you didn't get a chance to say while they were still living. If there is healing that needs to happen between you, ask for forgiveness or offer it. Express gratitude for the time you shared together. Talk about memories that are special to you. Express anything in your heart and on your mind.

Next, write a letter back from your loved one imagining how they might want to respond to you if they were able. Keep these letters until you feel ready to let them go. Burn them in a fire ritual, bury them in the earth, or send them out into the ocean in a bottle. As you release the letters, say a prayer of gratitude for your continued healing.

Engage in meaningful rituals. After my brother, Kyle, died at the age of fifteen from Cystic Fibrosis, we honored his death and our grief by planting an oak tree in a nearby open space park. At the tree planting, a year after his death, family and friends gathered for a ceremony in which we scattered his ashes in the soil where the tree was being planted. Prayers were said and balloons were released. Every year since, family and friends have gathered to hike to the tree where we share pictures and memories.

Twelve years later, we continue to honor his death on his anniversary, but this year, instead of hiking to the tree, since my family and I were out of town near the ocean, we bought flower bouquets and threw the flower petals into the water after sharing in a circle. We talked about what we thought Kyle would be like today if he were still alive and what he would be doing with his life. While sharing, we cried allowing our grief to flow.

Even though it had been many years since Kyle's death, the grief was still very real, although, over time it has become less consuming. By setting aside time every year to honor our loss and express our grief, we are better able to move forward with our lives.

What are some meaningful rituals you can create? Think about what your loved one felt passionate about or what activities you enjoyed doing together. For example, my dad loved sailing. A year after his death, we chartered a sailboat in the San Francisco Bay and scattered his ashes near Angel Island, an area that we enjoyed sailing to when he was alive. Now, every time I see a sailboat in that area, I think of my dad.

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Memorialize your loss. Create a memory box, photo album or webpage with pictures and stories that honor your loved one and how they would want to be remembered. Dedicate a park bench in his or her name or have a piece of artwork created such as a collage of pictures and memorabilia. Check out www.BereavementArtists.com for more ideas.

The National September 11 Memorial is a great example. The lives of the nearly 3,000 people who were killed by terrorists attacks are honored with each name inscribed in bronze in the twin pools where the World Trade Center buildings stood. There is also a museum that commemorates each unique life with personal information, pictures, and memorabilia. The goal of the museum is to aspire to educate the millions of visitors who pass through each year in hopes of building a better future.

Give back. After a loved one dies or any major loss, it is common to feel a lack of meaning or purpose in life, as well as a sense of worthlessness. By joining an organization whose cause you feel passionate about, or creating your own, not only will you experience connection with others, but a sense of renewed purpose. Further, by spending time focusing on helping others, you will gain a healthier perspective about your loss.

In *29-Gifts: How a Month of Giving can Change your Life*, author Cami Walker is diagnosed with MS. This major loss of health caused her to reach out for help from a healer who suggested she give away 29 gifts in 29 days. The book describes her journey of transformation as she engages in this meaningful ritual. What are some ways you can give of your time and energy? Keep a journal and notice what it feels like to give.

Reach out for support: It is common after a major loss to want to hide out and isolate from the world. While taking time for self care and to process your feelings is important, continued isolation can lead to depression.

As you reach out for support, spend time with family and friends with whom you feel comfortable being yourself and who honor your grief. It may also be beneficial to join a grief support group. Check out your local hospice and see what they have to offer. These groups are often free. In addition, one-to-one counseling may help you resolve complicated feelings resulting from the trauma of your loss. As you progress with your grieving process, you might also consider engaging with a life coach who can help you move forward with your life and gain clarity about your dreams and visions for the future.

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Questions to ask yourself to determine if you may need extra help:

1. Do you frequently experience feeling irritable, annoyed, intolerant or angry?
2. Do you feel an ongoing sense of numbness or isolation from others? Do you feel like you have no one to talk to?
3. Do you feel anxious most of the time? Is it interfering with your relationships or ability to concentrate?
4. Do you feel preoccupied with your loss and think about it constantly even though it has been several months?
5. Do you feel restless and in high gear, like you need to be constantly busy?
6. Are you afraid of becoming close to new people for fear of losing again?
7. Do you find yourself acting in ways that may be harmful to you like drinking more, driving recklessly, or entertaining thoughts of suicide?
8. Are you heavily burdened by taking on too much responsibility?
9. Do you feel stuck in your grief, unable to move on, even though it has been some time since your loss?

If you find yourself answering *yes* to any of these questions or would like additional assistance with following the above suggestions, then I encourage you to reach out for professional support from a therapist or counselor who specializes in grief and bereavement, like my self. You don't have to walk through your pain alone.

It takes great courage to face your grief and allow it to be expressed. But, as you allow it to flow you are keeping your heart open, thus creating room for love to grow.

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Then a woman said, speak to us of Joy and Sorrow,

And he answered:

Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.

And the selfsame well from which your laughter

rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.

And how else can it be?

The deeper that sorrow carves into your

being, the more joy you can contain.

Is not the cup that holds your wine the very

cup that was burned in the potter's oven?

And is not the lute that soothes your spirit

the very wood that was hollowed with knives?

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart

and you shall find it is only that which has given you

sorrow that is giving you joy.

When you are sorrowful look again in your

heart and you shall see that in truth you are weeping

for that which has been your delight.

- The Prophet, Kahil Gibran

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*There is a brokenness
Out of which comes the unbroken,
A shatteredness out
Of which blooms the unshatterable.*

*There is sorrow
Beyond all grief which leads to joy
And a fragility
Out of whose depths emerges strength.*

*There is a hollow space
Too vast for words
Through which we pass with each loss,
Out of whose darkness
We are sanctified into being.*

*There is a cry deeper than all sound
Whose serrated edges cut the heart
As we break open
To the place inside which is
Unbreakable and whole.*

- Rashani

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On-Line Resources:

www.griefnet.org - provides information and resources related to death, dying, bereavement, and major emotional and physical losses including 50-e-mail grief support groups to choose from and a separate site for grieving kids.

www.growthhouse.org - provides quality information and resources on death and dying issues.

www.compassionatefriends.org – provides information for families who are grieving the death of a child including lists of local chapters, conferences, associated sites, books and other resources.

www.toheavenwithlove.com and www.ourletterstoheaven.com – these sites provide a place to share letters, tributes and memorials.

Suggested Reading

Glad No Matter What: Transforming Loss and Change into Gift and Opportunity, by SARK, 2010

Room for Change: Practical Ideas for Reviving After Loss, by Susan W. Reynolds, 2010

A Beautiful Death: Facing the Future with Peace, by Cheryl Eckl, 2010

Healing After Loss (Daily Meditations), by Martha W. Hickman, 2009

The Other Side of Sadness: What the New Science of Bereavement Tells Us About Life After Loss, by George A. Bonanno Ph.D., 2009

Living Through Loss: Interventions Across the Life Span, by Nancy Hooyman, 2008

GriefWork: Healing from Loss, by Fran Zamore & Ester Leutenberg, 2008

On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss, by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, David Kessler, 2007

Grieving Mindfully: A Compassionate and Spiritual Guide to Coping with Loss, by Sameet Kumar Ph.D., 2005

Life After Loss: A Practical Guide To Renewing Your Life After Experiencing Major Loss (4th Edition), by Bob Deits, 2004

Don't Let Death Ruin Your Life: A practical guide to reclaiming happiness after the death of a loved one, by Jill Brooke, 2001

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In Lieu of Flowers: A Conversation For The Living, by Nancy Cobb, 2000

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Karen is the author of ***Sail Into Your Dreams: 8 Steps to Living a More Purposeful Life***, a speaker, Life Transformation Coach and Grief Counselor. She assists her clients to heal their grief, so they can experience more joy, vitality and purpose in life. If you are ready to heal your grief and move on with your life, call or e-mail Karen today to schedule a **FREE** 30-minute phone consultation to determine if her services are a good fit for you - **(831) 359-2441** or **CreativeTransformations@yahoo.com**. She offers private phone, Skype, or in-person sessions. You can also check out her website for more useful information about this topic and to join her e-mail list to receive future articles and offerings:
www.LiveAPurposefulLife.com

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