

Taking Care of Yourself

1. Nutrition

It is easy for person experiencing grief to eat a lot of 'junk' food. You may want to eat all of the time (trying to fill up the empty feeling), or you may have a loss of appetite, it is important to eat daily portions of food from each of the four basic food groups (meat, milk, cheese, apple, raisins, nuts, carrots, etc.)

2. Daily Exercise

Exercise is important so that your muscles can provide the appropriate pumping functions for nourishing and cleansing the body. Regular exercise is also the most effective means for controlling depression ("the blues"). Those chemicals of the brain which cause feelings of alertness and happiness are stimulated in exercise. Also, exercise will help you sleep better.

3. Drink Plenty of Water

Under stress such as grief, the body muscles tighten up and use more body fluid. Water helps to maintain proper muscle tone by giving muscles their natural ability to contract and by preventing dehydration. Water also helps rid the body of waste. Adequate fluids depend on body weight (6 to 8 glasses a day). Pop and tea are not good because of the caffeine.

4. Rest and Relaxation

It is important that regular rituals for rest are followed. Grief is an exhausting process emotionally. You need to replenish yourself. Physically you will be more prone to colds, sore throats, and the flu. It is important that your body has time to rest and regain its strength and energy. When you find yourself under stress or unable to slow down because you are too active, you may need to do some relaxation exercises. (Show them some deep breathing exercises or how to relax their muscles).

5. Support you have

Find that person or persons who can give you support and it may need to be outside the family. Someone that will listen to you without judging will let you talk about your dead loved one or about a problem you may be having, and someone who will keep in confidence what you have said.

6. Learn to ask for what you need

Sometimes you may have needs that others won't be able to see or understand, so it is important for you to learn how to ask for those need to be met You may need to ask for someone to listen to you, for a hug when you are hurting, or for your parent and/or teacher to help you with school work and with concentration. Don't assume that those around you know what you are thinking or feeling; you may have to tell them. Let's practice saying "I need a hug."

7. Tears

Tears are a natural part of grief, and they help relieve stress. You must give yourself permission to cry. This part of being human. Suppressing your tears may even be physically harmful because of the toxic substance some tears give off.

8. Laugh

Don't be afraid to laugh. It's healthy and is often needed to relieve tension. Laughter is the sunshine of the soul. You may even want to go to a movie that will make you laugh. Don't feel guilty about laughing. Just because you laugh doesn't mean that you aren't grieving or missing your loved one.⁹⁹

9. Remember

- a) Feel the pain; accept your emotions. They are part of grief. The pain is part of the healing process.
- b) Death ends a life but it does not end a relationship. Memories go on in the survivor's mind. Let your loved one be with you by remembering.
- c) You may not be grieving like those around you. What is grief to you may not be grief to someone else. It is all right because everyone grieves differently. Allow yourself to grieve your own way.
- d) Allow yourself to accept the expressions of caring from others.
- e) Escape for a while and find a spot of peace and quiet
- f) Take days and things one at a time.
- g) Give yourself a pat on the back for the things you do well, but don't try to be perfect.

Suggestions for Family and Friends

Someone close to you has just been through a traumatic event and they need your support. Spend some time with them and listen to how the incident has affected them. Remind them that their reactions are normal and assure them that they will be feeling better soon. If they are experiencing mood swings or are unusually cranky, don't take it personally. Help them to understand that these feelings may be the symptoms of critical incident stress and remind them of the self-care techniques. Help them to get back to their usual routine but also allow some quiet time to recover. If you feel they are experiencing extreme distress, seek professional guidance.