

“Grief Work” is Hard Work

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Grief Work is the physical and emotional work that is done while grieving the loss of someone very special. It is called “work” because it is challenging and difficult – but in the end, the work that you do will be the saving grace that heals your broken heart. There are many ways to do your **grief work**, but they all encourage you to feel the pain of your loss, while integrating the loss into your life in a meaningful way. While many people would encourage you to try not to think about your loved one who died and move on, I am urging you to honor your spouse, parent, sibling, child, relative, or friend who died in as many ways possible to keep his/her memory alive in your life.

Talking about the person who died with people who are willing to listen is one way of doing your **grief work**. Although it may make you cry, please don’t think of this as something negative. Society seems to judge how well you are doing by measuring how many tears you shed, with crying being a sign that you are not doing well. Remember – well meaning family and friends want you to be back to normal, and the fact is that you now have a “new normal” which includes a broken heart.

There are many other ways that you can do your **grief work**. Here are some suggestions:

- Attend a support group in your area. This is a wonderful form of **grief work** because it gives you the opportunity to grieve in the presence of others who may feel the same way that you do.
- Have a Mass offered in memory of your loved one. By participating in the service, you are doing your **grief work**.
- If your loved one is buried in a cemetery, do your **grief work** by visiting the grave and placing flowers or balloons at the site. If you have their remains in the form of ashes in an urn, display it in a special place in your home. Create a little shrine for your loved one.

- On the person's birthday, have a balloon release with loving messages attached on small pieces of paper.
- Prepare the person's favorite meal and remember them as you enjoy it with family and friends. This can be done on the anniversary of the death, their birthday, or any day that you want to honor them.
- Wear a special piece of jewelry, such as a pin or a pendant with the person's initials or birthstone in memory of them. Wear a piece of jewelry that belonged to the person, creating a "linking object" to that person.
- Wear an article of clothing that belonged to them, such as a shirt, a tie, or a scarf.
- Participate in a Memory Walk in honor of your loved one.
- Donate a gift to someone in need at holiday time in memory of your special person.
- Create a Memory Garden in your yard.
- Plant a tree at your home or at a local school or church.
- Donate a bench at a favorite park or golf course with their name on the plaque.
- Display photos of the person in your home.
- Volunteer your time in their memory at a hospital or for a special cause.

Losing your loved one may be the most painful thing that you have ever felt, and the pain may be excruciating, especially in the first weeks and months. Finding joy in life may feel very unnatural and even disrespectful to your loved one. You will be invited to holiday celebrations, birthday parties, weddings, etc, and the last thing that you feel like doing is being happy. Give yourself permission to feel some joy, while still holding the memories and sorrow in your heart. Gradually integrate yourself back into participating in life's celebrations. Every time you push yourself to do something that you are afraid to do, you are doing your **grief work**.

In order to live well and love well, you must grieve well. Dose yourself and do your **grief work** at a pace that feels comfortable for you.

God gave us two hands – one to hold our sorrow and one to hold our joy.

As you mourn the death of your loved one, allow yourself to find a balance between your sorrow and your joy.

*Remembering the person I have loved allows me to slowly heal.
Healing does not mean I will forget. Actually, it means I will remember.
Gently, I will move forward, never forgetting my past.*

Taken from
The Journey Through Grief.
Reflections On Healing
By Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D