

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

FOR GRIEF SUFFERERS

from a Friend at GriefHelp.org

Chances are, you are at a fork in the road. I know because I have been there and without even realizing it. One road is a dark path with no lights and no destination. The road is filled with numerous tunnels and it has no outlet. It leads nowhere but a life of despair and regret.

The other path is a high road. This high road is very rocky, has twists and turns, and many sharp drops. It is anything but a smooth road but it heads in the right direction. Although it appears beyond our sight, many miles away, its destination can be a wonderful place. A destination of peace and tranquility, like a gorgeous rainbow viewed from a mountaintop.

When you are at the crossroads, you are given a choice to make: which road will my life take? My mission and the goal of this guidebook are to help you take the high road.

Having personally survived a traumatic and unexpected loss, and having a background in writing, I long felt the need to write a book on the subject of grief. I always felt that there would be an opportunity to offer my experiences to others suffering in the same fashion.

About the Author

On January 9, 1997 I lost someone who wasn't supposed to die. My wife of four years, a beautiful 26-year-old woman, perished on a commercial airline flight that stalled and plummeted in the winter sky. There was no preparing me for this sudden turn of events. My life changed instantly and nothing would ever be the same again.

With the help of friends and family, whom I can never repay, I took the high road. Thankfully, I am here only a few years later in a position of strength – God-given strength allowing me to bring support and encouragement to those in need.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Matthew 5:4

After much prayer and thought, I wrote this support guide to help others suffering through grief. It is a short and easy read, but I believe it is jam-packed with valuable and meaningful advice. I pray that it helps you and that you will be in similar position some day to help others in need.

Understanding Grief

“Grief only comes in one size, extra large.” Dennis Manning

If grief can be summed up in a nutshell, it is how *we feel* now that an important person is no longer in our life. In essence, we hurt and feel sorry for ourselves. Our focus is usually

on what WE lost. Grief, of course, is a normal reaction to the loss of someone or something. Each of us will handle these feelings in our own way and in our own time. There is no blueprint to the process and no timetable to how long you will hurt.

Author J. William Worden describes four facets of mourning:

- 1 - Accepting the reality of the loss
- 2 – Experiencing the pain of grief
- 3 – Adjusting to an environment without the lost loved one
- 4 – Reinvesting emotional energy in life

Having been through the complete grief process, I can relate to each of these “steps.” Accepting the loss almost immediately helped me move on with my mourning quicker, although it didn’t make anything easier.

I cannot help you acknowledge the reality of your loss. Only you can do that, and hopefully you are well past that stage by the time you receive this book.

Sometimes, intense feelings of grief will catch us by surprise. It may startle you when you fall “into the pits” several months after the tragedy. It is at this time that many people will be expecting you to be over your loss. Don’t believe them. It is only normal for this to happen. Just remember your grief is unique.

Understand that a main purpose of grief is to help you reach the point in your life when you can remember without the pain.

What I present later in this guide are several steps to help you get through the grieving process in a positive manner.

Which Road? THE CHOICE IS YOURS!

Individuals who do not recover from a tragedy often live in the past. They constantly relive what happened. Anger builds up inside them. Regret is overwhelming. In their minds, blame must be assessed. They are looking for something to help them feel better to little avail.

You have been hurt in a way that feels beyond repair. Not only are you mourning the loss of your loved one, but you are also grieving the loss of fairness in your life and the loss of your past life.

Begin by asking yourself this: “How would your lost loved one(s) wish for you to live the rest of your life?” Would they want you to wallow in self-pity? Would they want you to be bitter? Or, would they want you to move on and eventually find a way to be happy?

“...everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the freedom to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances.” Viktor Frankl, Man’s Search for Meaning

Let me assure you that YOU WILL BE a stronger person for this experience. It is, of course, not the way any of us would like to grow stronger as a human being. Unfortunately, we do not get to choose the roadblocks in life. With the support of families and friends and your own self-fortitude, you will barrel right through this roadblock, while glancing in the mirror and thinking, “what can hurt me now?”

“Whatever decisions you make in life, I need you to be happy. I will respect any decisions you make.” That’s what United 93 passenger Jeremy Glick said to his wife Lyzbeth by cell phone in the final moments before he and other passengers helped prevent another mass tragedy on September 11, 2001. I believe he was speaking for all the people who lost their lives that day.

Make the decision easy and take the high road by choosing a full and growing life. By doing so, it’s the best memorial you can ever give your loved one.

The Support from Others

The outpouring of love and support I received from friends and family was something I will never forget. My parents stayed with me for weeks until they decided it was time to return to their home 800 miles away. In the days after the tragedy, friends would come over to my house on a daily basis to provide their moral support, bring food, and/or see if there was any way they could lend a hand. Strangers I didn’t even know wrote me letters, sending their condolences and prayers. The response was amazing.

Unfortunately, there had to come a time when the daily visits stopped, my parents left, the letters no longer came, etc. As expected, people had to move on with their lives. So did I. It was at that time that I made the conscience decision to take the high road. I didn’t know if I could stay on it. I didn’t know where it would lead. By golly, I had to make the best of a horrible situation. I knew there had to be a light at the end of the tunnel; however, I could not see the end of the tunnel. I would go on faith.

What Others Can’t Give You

For starters, don’t let anyone tell you how you should feel, or how long you should grieve. Grieving will take as long as it has to. Unless your friends and family are going through the same exact situation, they have no idea about your unique grief situation. Spend the most time with caring friends and relatives that lend a listening ear.

“Don’t be brave. Well-meaning friends may say ‘be brave’ or ‘you’ll feel fine tomorrow.’ That kind of advice invalidates your feelings, trivializes your loss. Don’t be brave. You will not feel fine tomorrow. You will still hurt something awful. And you will hurt a whole lot longer if you try to deny your feelings.” Larson, Suddenly Single

When it comes to past relationships, expect some changes. Some acquaintances may begin to treat you differently and possibly avoid you all together. Understand that it is likely because they do not know what to say or how to act. Instead, build your life around the people who are willing to take that risk.

More than likely, you will have to take a “one day at a time” attitude. Your experience will be influenced by several different factors such as your religious beliefs, your relationship with the lost loved one, the manner in which the person(s) died, etc. Take as long as you need, and don’t let anyone tell you differently.

Dealing with loneliness is another aspect of your life in which no one else can help you. Verdell Davis in her book “Riches Stored in Secret Places” tells of her struggle with loneliness and how it eventually was viewed as gift.

“Loneliness is too close a companion for me to be at all objective. It has gone home with me on long walks, sat with me through numerous silent evenings, stood with me in the middle of a group of laughing people, and lay across the bed with me while I cried because I didn’t know what else to do. It seems that even when I escape it for a while, it is waiting not too far away. We have had long talks, loneliness and I, and I have to say that I have learned much more from our journeying together. We have become friends. But the friendship was a long time in coming.”

She continues: *“Loneliness did not just come into my life with the accident that left me a widow, but it did become immensely intensified then...could it be that loneliness is given to us as a reminder that this world was never intended to be our home and the things of this world were never intended to satisfy us?”*

Some individuals may prefer to be alone during much of the grieving process, but you may be like many others who find life much more difficult when lonely. Eventually, you will become more comfortable with your solitude but no one can help you get to that point except yourself.

Finally, understand that your family, friends and support group may help get you on the right path (on the high road), but very early in the process, you have to get behind the wheel. Only you can complete the road to recovery.

Physical Symptoms

Grief affects us in various ways, many of which are physical. Of course, it also affects us emotionally, mentally, spiritually and socially.

One physical experience you may have already encountered is a “grief attack.” You may lose your breath and feel an overwhelming rush of panic. The result can be a frightening and overwhelming experience that leaves you feeling confused, vulnerable, even crazy. Again, this is only normal. If this occurs, I recommend three things: take deep breaths, pray, and seek someone who listens well. Talk to this person about your grief and you will likely feel better.

Other physical symptoms include: insomnia, fatigue, loss of appetite, weakness, dizziness, and tightness in chest, throat or stomach. For these reasons, it is extra important to take care of yourself, eat right, and do things at your own pace.

Not Recommended

There are several things I wouldn't suggest that you do during the grieving process. Don't be a martyr. Many people feel that they must suffer in order to prove how much they loved their lost one.

Don't wear a mask. When people ask you how you're doing, let me know the truth. Maybe that person who cared enough to ask will lend a trusting ear.

Try not to make hasty decisions about anything. Often, major changes, e.g. selling your home, are difficult to reverse. Give it time for you to really think things through before making a major change in your life.

I would strongly recommend that you avoid drinking alcohol during the grieving process. Alcohol is a depressant and its effects can be greatly enhanced when you are emotionally unstable. Taking drugs or alcohol may temporarily ease the pain one feels but, needless to say, they are huge roadblocks on the road to recovery.

Don't neglect your health. Staying in good physical health will hasten your road to recovery.

"God is so faithful that when you endure through things, there's a blessing that comes. But the enemy is still going to attack you. And as he attacks, you just have to understand that you're going through a trial and you have to persevere." Randall Cunningham

Don't give up. What follows are some steps to help you persevere.

STEPS TO RECOVERY

"...boredom is fertile ground for depression and self-pity." Care Notes

Get busy. That is one of my best recommendations to those mourning the ones they lost and still grieving the life they once had. Don't take this recommendation of getting busy as a "run and hide" suggestion. You're not running away from your problem. Instead, what I suggest is that you start taking positive action. By doing so, you will keep your mind and heart preoccupied. When you are not doing anything, you have plenty of time to sit around and think. And that, we know, causes pain. What else will you be thinking about but the problems at-hand. [Here are some ways to start taking action.](#)

First, join any support groups you can find. Local churches usually offer grief support groups. Don't worry if you are not a member of the church. Most churches are more than happy to take in an "outsider." Besides, you'll be viewed as a potential future member, something almost every church needs! Note that Hospices also offer these types of support groups.

What will I find in a support group? In a support group you will find several other people going through similar circumstances. Their situations may be different, but the end result is the same. They are no longer with the person they love. Bereavement support groups are a safe haven, comprised of people who understand what you are going through.

If for some reason, a grief support group is not available in your area, consider joining a small group at church. Small groups are full of loving individuals who are willing to offer their support to others going through difficult times in their life.

Secondly, consider one-on-one counseling. When you break a leg, you go to the doctor. Well, it's no different with your emotional pain. Seek the help you need.

Again, your local church is an excellent resource for such a counselor. Some have a psychiatrist on staff willing to provide their services at an affordable cost, sometimes free for those unable to pay.

“Staying passive fuels depression, while taking action raises your self-esteem and generates feelings of power and hope.” Care Notes

Although it may be difficult sometimes, accept invitations from friends and family. Let them help you keep an active life.

Other ideas for taking action include performing volunteer work, joining a club or organization, and taking that course at the local college that you always considered doing.

Keep in mind that television is no substitute for keeping busy. Instead read a good book – there are books available on nearly every subject imaginable. There are several excellent resources listed at the end of this guide.

At the same time you are keeping busy, you will often experience situations of extreme fatigue. This is only normal. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Make it a point to eat well and get the necessary rest.

Rid yourself of any guilt. No relationship is perfect, so try not to dwell on what you could have done better in the relationship with your lost loved one. Learn from the experience and make a commitment to avoid the same “mistakes” in the future.

“My mother and sister must be very happy to be home with God, and I am sure their love and prayers are always with me. When I go home to God, for death is nothing else but going home to God, the bond of love will be unbroken for all eternity.”

Mother Teresa

Do what you enjoy. Consider your hobbies and plan for them to be part of your life again. Maybe you enjoy fishing. Plan one day a week in which you set aside time to fish. Whether you do this solo or with friends, make it a part of your regular routine.

Planning may be the furthest thing from your mind, but I strongly believe this helps us stay busy. If you know that every Saturday afternoon is for fishing, then you are more likely to have a full day on Saturday. The idea is to stay busy and avoid becoming paralyzed by grief. Often when a grieving person has nothing to do or nothing planned for that day, they are at risk of having a miserable day. Poor days are counterproductive to the recovery process. We want to do our best to avoid them.

You may find yourself in a situation where you come home and now have no one to share news with or to talk to. It is at this time that your loss really hits home. This is one of the reasons we want to stay busy and occupy these hours with activities. Living an active life helps to fill the void.

Exercise is another great way to stay busy, and one I employed during my recovery process. In fact, I set goals in regards to my daily exercise plan. I had a plan to better myself physically, and a result I benefited emotionally. Physical exercise works wonders on the mind. I can say from personal experience that I usually felt much better after I had just worked out.

Taking action and staying busy is one of my most important recommendations in this guidebook. Doing so gives you a sense of control, which is something you so dearly lost in this tragedy. Most importantly, you will not allow grief to paralyze you because that can be very destructive to the recovery process.

Help Others

“For me, the earthquake is not an ‘act of God.’ The act of God is the courage of people to rebuild their lives after the earthquake, and the rush of others to help them in whatever way they can.” Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*

The Rabbi Harold Kushner in his famous book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* urges people to forget the question, “why did this happen” and begin to ask the question, “what do I do now that this has happened?” That is taking the high road, my friends. [This book is highly recommended for anyone struggling with the role of God when a tragedy occurs.]

Individuals who recover from tragedy give the event meaning. Their future actions, whether it be the creation of a memorial or taking steps to prevent similar, future losses, help turn tragedy into triumph.

During my recovery process, I spoke with one woman who had lost her husband in a plane crash. What had become of her life? She devoted her free time to combating the flaws in the aviation industry. She would travel to Washington D.C. and speak about the problems that needed to be fixed. Her mission was correcting what was wrong with the

system, helping to prevent others from going through what she had to go experience. That is giving the loss meaning.

I attended church the Sunday following September 11, 2001. The church was wall-to-wall people. It was amazing to see so many people flocking to church in search of an answer, comfort, etc.

The preacher spoke on the subject at hand. He spoke of a woman who had lost a family member in the Oklahoma City bombing. A woman who had lost her husband in the infamous Pan Am 103 crash comforted her and helped her get through the grieving process. Where do you think this Oklahoma City woman was the week of September 11, 2001? She was in New York helping others in need.

“All praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the source of every mercy and the God who comforts us. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.” 2 Corinthians 1:3 (New Living Translation)

Eventually you will feel good enough, having regained some of your emotional stability and physical energy, to reach out to others in need. When you get to this point in your recovery process, you’ll know you have driven far down the high road.

Make a list of the positive things in your life. This could include the beautiful aspects of your relationship with your loved one. If you believe your loved one is now in a better place, put that on the list! Be thankful of what you had with that person, e.g. a loving relationship. If you are still in good health, put that on the list. Brainstorm and you will come up with many items for your list. Now keep that list handy for future reference; specifically for depressed moments - times when you need to be reminded.

Pray. Believing in my heart that my wonderful wife was now in the Lord’s presence was of great comfort to me. Having faith is a great source of relief and support during the recovery process. If you haven’t had much experience with prayer, simply speak to God as if you and He were the only ones in the room. Express your anger over the injustice of your loss; share your fears, just talk. Establish your relationship with God as a safe place to hide. Let God know that you need His healing power. Ask Him to take on some of your burden. Tell God that you cannot do it along; that you so desperately need His help. Pray for understanding and for the strength to go from one day to the next.

“God is a safe place to hide, ready to help when we need him.” Psalm 46:1

When you pray, visualize where you want to be in life. Picture a happier life in the near future. Now, thank God for taking you to that happier life. Keep this prayer close to your heart and I GUARANTEE that He will bring you there.

“Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop.” Proverbs 12:25

There is another form of visualization that I suggest you try if you are struggling with the way your loved one died. Close your eyes and picture the scene. However, this time visualize the scene of your loved one in the presence of God. For example, if you're a Christ follower, picture Jesus or angels walking hand-in-hand with your loved one at the moment of death. Knowing that your loved one was not alone at the moment of death can bring about a real sense of healing.

Your Current Status

Let's analyze where you are at during this stage in your life. Think about what you do each day and the regular activities you perform. Now ask yourself, are these actions conducive to taking the high road? Are you performing "positive" activities? Are you living a life that your lost loved one would be proud of?

If the answer to any of these questions are no, then we need to take alternative action and get you on the high road. Use the ideas presented earlier as a guideline for steps you can take to recovery. They come from personal experience.

You CAN get through this. The beauty of the high road is that there are bridges over from the dark road. You don't have to backtrack to find your way onto the right path. You can jump on that path at any time. Just follow the suggestions presented here or think long and hard for ideas that will help you given your unique situation. Incorporate other family members who are also grieving. Let others help you in any way they can.

Helen Keller once stated: *"When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us."* Taking the high road is the search for that open door. I did it, and I recommend you do too because you will never regret it.

Understand that healing does not mean forgetting. Your loved one will always occupy a special place in your heart and mind. No matter what the future brings or how happy your life becomes, nothing will ever change that.

There will come a day when you awake and go on with your life. You day will not be consumed with the thoughts of your loss. You'll have stopped asking the question "Why?" Gradually over time this day will come without you even realizing it. When it does, you will find yourself establishing new relationships and performing new activities. You will have found joy and peace and a new appreciation for life.

When this time comes, you will know that you have taken the high road. You will have turned a corner with the destination in sight. The storm cloud has dissipated behind you, and in the distance is a beautiful rainbow. However, the high road does not end at this destination but instead takes you on other smoother paths to other great destinations.

May God's grace bless you with a happier life.

References and Recommended Resources:

The Bible (see scripture selections below)

Bereavement: A Magazine of Hope and Healing, Bereavement Publishing, 8133 Telegraph Dr., Colorado Springs, CO 80920

Care Notes, One Caring Place, Abbey Press, St. Meinrad, IN 47577

Giving Sorrow Words: How to Cope with Grief and Get on With Your Life, Candy Lightner, Nancy Hathaway, 1990

Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy, J. William Worden

The Grieving Child: A Parent's Guide, Helen Fitzgerald, Simon And Schuster, A Fireside Book, 1992.

Helping Children Cope With Grief, Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt

Hope For the Troubled Heart, Billy Graham, Word Publishing, 1991

I Tell You A Mystery, Johann Christopher Arnold, The Plough Publishing House, 1996

Money Matters, AARP Fulfillment (#d12380), 1909 K St., Washington D.C. 20049, (202) 728-4370

No Time For Goodbyes, Janice Harris Lord, Pathfinder, 1990

Power for Living, Jamie Buckingham, Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation

Riches Stored in Secret Places, Verdell Davis, Word Publishing, 1994

The Special Care Series (4 publications), Doug Manning, In-sight Books

Suddenly Single, Hal & Susan Larson, Halo Books, 1993

Starting Over: Help for Young Widows and Widowers, Adele Rice Nudel,

Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers: How to Cope Losing Someone You Love, Earl A. Grollman, Beacon Press, 1993

Talking About Death: A Dialogue Between Parent and Child, Earl Grollman, Beacon Press, 1974

When Bad Things Happen to Good People, Harold S. Kushner, Avon Publishing, 1981

Widowed Persons Services, AARP, 1909 K St., Washington D.C. 20049, (202) 728-4370

Websites

www.barrharris.org - for help with children

www.compassionatefriends.org - for parents who lost a child

www.griefnet.org - the newsgroup list for those grieving

www.nmha.org - National Mental Health Organization

www.pentagonangels.net - for Pentagon and Flight 77 victims

www.griefhelp.org - website for this publication

SCRIPTURE SELECTIONS:

Old Testament:

Genesis 50:20-21 [Chapter 50, Verse 20 thru 21]

Deuteronomy 28:7

Deuteronomy 31:6

Psalms 23:1-6

Psalms 27:1-3, 13-14

Psalms 31: 1-17

Psalms 32:7, 10

Psalms 34:18-22

Psalms 46:1

Psalms 55:22

Psalms 69:14-17

Psalms 71:20

Psalms 94:5-11, 22-23

Psalms 116:1-2

Proverbs 3:5-6

Proverbs 12:25

Isaiah 55:10

New Testament:

Book of Matthew 5:4

Book of Luke 22:39-46

Romans 5:4-5

Romans 8:31-32, 38-39

Romans 13:12, 21

2nd Corinthians 1:3, 10

2nd Timothy 1:7

Hebrews 13:5-6

1st Peter 1:7

1st Peter 5:7

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