

WILL I EVER GET OVER THIS LOSS?

Grieving over the loss of a loved one can feel interminable. As the days of sorrow persist, we begin to wonder: Will I ever get over this loss? How long will my grief last? Will my misery ever end? We cannot foresee an end to this painful journey we are on.

We may wish our discomfort would just disappear. We tire of the complex mix of feelings that grief entails -- sadness, regret, guilt, anger, disappointment, and longing. We hate being so uncomfortable, so much of the time. We may feel imprisoned by our feelings, unable to break free.

On the other hand, we appreciate that our intense emotions express how much we loved the one we've lost. Each tear, each moment of regret can remind us not just of our pain but also of our love. Because our unhappiness symbolizes our love, we may feel conflicted about finishing our grief. I always remind clients that our love, not our grief, is our best testimonial to our dead.

How long should grief take? Grief takes as long as it takes - - a week, a month, a year or more depending on who we have lost and how this death impacts us. We must allow our strong feelings, feel them, in order to move through them and move beyond them.

We might like to skip grief, but we cannot. Even when we can temporarily deny our pain, it still exists. It may eventually erupt, maybe at an inappropriate moment or during another upset or illness. We may just want the pain to be over with - right now! We may feel desperate to stop hurting and get on with life. Just as we hurry through life, we may be driven to get over our grief as quickly as possible. People in our culture want everything to be quick and easy. We may not savor feelings any more than we savor scenery or life

experiences. We may want to rush ourselves through our pain, thinking we should just get over it.

What does it mean to get over grief? It means not being in pain over our loss forever. We tend to think discomforts are permanent, and good feelings are only temporary. Pain can be temporary too. We don't forget or stop loving the person we loved, but we don't always have to grieve. We can love and remember without pain. Ultimately, grief does subside.

It is important to trust that grief is a process that is time-limited, not forever. Too often we hear the awful message that we never stop grieving, never get over loss. This is not true! But, if we believe that we will never recover from a loss, that idea can become an unfortunate self-fulfilling prophecy. When we believe we can recover, we do. If we believe we will suffer for always, sometimes we make that true.

If we have no tools for overcoming sorrow, and if the world tries to stifle our grief, grief persists longer. We must seek help, if we cannot seem to overcome our pain. After my brother died when I was seventeen, I believed I'd grieve forever. For fourteen years after his death I kept sorrow alive by believing it was endless. I didn't know how to stop my grief. Finally, a good therapist helped me fully express my uncomfortable feelings -- like my anger at his death -- and I was able to stop grieving. Only then could I remember David with out pain.

Grief that persists for years harms us and limits our lives. It keeps us living in the past instead of the present. It keeps us from loving the people who are still alive. Because I mourned for so long, I was stunted by my grief-- afraid to love, afraid to trust, afraid to commit, afraid to have children I might lose. If I had help to move through my grief more quickly -- perhaps months instead of years -- I might have taken more risks in life.

Part of what blocked my healing was the faulty belief that I needed to grieve forever to represent how much I loved my brother. Grief is a lousy testimonial to dead people. Our best testimonial is to live a great life in their honor.

No matter how much we may hurt today, we must remember that grief is temporary. Mourning does not have to last forever. We can finish crying and expressing all our many feelings around this loss. We can find in ourselves the courage to recover and heal. We can begin to live fully and love again. Remember that our healing is both a gift to ourselves and a way to honor our dead.

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