

## **After the First Year**

### *When you have lost a loved one*

The first year after a loved one's death may bring pain, disbelief, the agony of having to face reality, and many other deep emotions. Many have never had these emotions before, or at least not to the same depth.

For most people, the first year is the hardest. The years that follow are usually not quite as filled with pain.

Even though you may be feeling better, you may not be nearly as healed as you would like. Keep being gentle with yourself. Think about all the changes you've been through, all the hurdles you've overcome, and the energy it took just to keep going. Remember, grief is different for everyone. The grieving process is like fingerprints or snowflakes, and no two stories are alike. Don't compare yourself to others, or think that you need to follow a certain schedule in your grieving process.

We hope you find these suggestions and insights helpful:

- Beware of becoming critical of yourself, either consciously or unconsciously. Don't try to live up to unrealistic expectations.
- Over time, you may gain a different perspective. You may no longer deny the death, but now face the reality and the changes it brings.
- Think about how you have coped with grief this past year. If you handled your emotions in ways that did not help, try some new ways of coping with your loss. This may include attending a support group, calling a friend, reading about grief, or setting up a time to visit with the bereavement coordinator at UWMC.
- Find a friend or counselor who will let you talk about your grief, the death, and the changes you are facing. Talking with someone is one way to avoid feeling overwhelmed with sorrow.
- Don't ignore any of your emotions. Some emotions may be harder for you to deal with or express. Find someone to talk to about how you are feeling. Journaling or writing about the hard times helps, too. Find a way to express all of your feelings.





*“Joy and pain can live in the same house. Neither should deny the other.”*

~ Tan Neng

*“Praise day at night, and life in the end.”*

~ Proverb

## Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

UWMC Grief and Loss  
Services: 206.598.1614

- Other events in your life may also be adding to your grief. Trouble with family members, work problems, or needy friends may slow your progress. Realize that this happens to many grieving people. You will be able to sort it all out and to keep working on your grief.
- You may or may not cry as often as you did at first. If you do cry, remember it is part of the healing process. Don't fight back the tears.
- Be sure to continue regular check-ups with your healthcare provider. Many grief reactions are physical and need to be attended to.
- Changes in sleep pattern often happens in grief. If you are having trouble sleeping, try cutting back or giving up all caffeine and alcohol.
- Stay active. Physical exercise helps you to relax and offers a routine for you to follow. Taking a walk in nature every day can be very healing.
- Remember to balance your activities. Make time for work, recreation, exercise, hobbies, and rest.
- Your grief may make you feel out of control or as if you are going crazy. Many people feel this way after the death of a loved one. Realize that grief work takes time – much more time than you wish it would. Please be patient with yourself.
- People may have told you that “time will heal” your grief. Time does soften the hurt a bit, but it is what you do with time that really helps: read, talk, struggle, get help when you become stuck, be gentle with yourself, lower your expectations, and seek out pleasant times with family and friends.
- You may feel very lonely as you think about life without your loved one. Find new friends, worthwhile work and hobbies, and reconnect with friends from the past. This is hard work, but it is vital to your healing.
- If you feel guilty, acknowledge how you feel. Do not suppress any of your emotions. Really look at the “if onlys.” Remind yourself, “I did the best I could at the time, and so did my loved one.”
- Don't expect too much from your family. They are grieving, too.
- Consider that even though you are struggling with grief, you would rather have had the time with your loved one than not to have had them in your life at all.
- Set realistic goals for your future. Get clear on your most pressing concerns. Think of all possible solutions. Choose one plan and do it.
- So many of us have been brought up to be independent. You may tell yourself, “I'm going to handle this grief myself.” But, asking for help from people who care about you can make a big difference in your working through your grief. Force yourself to reach out for help.