

“Five Musts for Deep Healing”

During my 20 years of experience as a grief counselor, I have watched griever survive and thrive. The following ‘Musts’ are common to healthy grieving and ultimately to deep healing.

Feel your Feelings

Although this may seem like a simple directive, it requires tremendous courage to feel pain with acceptance. Many feelings arise with grief: anger, frustration, resentment, despair, longing, hopelessness, sadness, fear, and even joy. Learning how to welcome each feeling as we do our breath, like an essential part of living, is something that we are not used to doing. Often, we are taught to squelch feelings and keep a “stiff upper lip.” With grief, the opposite is necessary. Allow your feelings to ebb and flow, like the tides of the ocean.

Experience all of your feelings, knowing that the process of doing so is important and healing. Be gentle with yourself, for the process requires a great deal of energy, and will feel tiring. When we let our emotions wash over us and through us without clinging to them, we honor our relationship with our loved one.

Feelings may be quite intense in the first year or two after a major loss, but do not be surprised when intense feelings also surface many years later. This is not unusual and is known as a process of “retriggering”. Again, the goal is to ride the waves with gentle acceptance. Know that all emotions change and flow even as your love remains constant.

How:

- ***schedule time each day when you focus on your grief. Light a candle, look at photographs, and let yourself cry or yell or hit a pillow.***
- ***If something stirs your sadness, let yourself go with it. If you’re in public, excuse yourself to a restroom or your car and let yourself cry.***

Express your Feelings

Once we are feeling our feelings, it helps to have an outlet – a way to express the feelings outside of ourselves. Finding an avenue of expression facilitates the healing process. It isn't necessary to be an artist but finding a way to get our feelings 'out' is important. Creating movement of our most intense feelings starts to make room for more love to fill us.

How:

- Journaling is an excellent way to express pent-up feelings. Try these prompts:

Today, my grief feels like . . .

Today, I'm surprised that I feel . . .

Today, I'm really missing . . .

Today, I wish that . . .

- Join a support group in person or on-line where you can talk to other grievors and share your experience. This is an incredibly powerful means of support and expression.
- Create poetry or music, fiction or art that expresses how you feel
- Take a deep breath and let out a loud, audible 'sigh'

Make a Connection with your Loved One Every Day

Death does not end our relationships. Fortunately for all of us, love transcends loss. Therefore, you are very much still in relationship with your loved one. Staying connected on a daily basis doesn't mean living in the past or being stuck. Staying connected is a healthy way to honor our loved one's continued influence on our lives as we continue to grow and learn . . . and it is a way of staying open to the love that is ever present in our hearts.

How:

- Light a candle at special meals to symbolize the presence of your loved one
- Say hello to their picture and blow a kiss every day

- Visit the gravesite as often as feels comfortable to you
- Teach people around you that you want to remember, that you want to talk about your loved one, that you're comfortable sharing memories
- Write a letter to your loved one on birthdays, anniversaries, and the 'death day' to express your thoughts, to connect with them, to reflect on where you are with your grief. Keep these letters in a special place through the years so that you can see how life is flowing and changing.

Fill your Life with Gratitude

Although we may not be feeling gratitude when we are consumed with grief, gratitude is an active way to facilitate deep healing. It's important to be grateful for the life of our loved ones, rather than focusing exclusively on their death and our loss. Imagine that they had never been born and you had never experienced their presence in your life. In so doing we can gradually begin to open our hearts to the experience of love. Also, practicing gratitude for simple pleasures helps us to shine light on the blessings in our lives even in the midst of our grief. It is in this way that we begin to transcend the weightiness of grief and experience the full beauty of love and life, both in the past and in the present.

How:

- **Make a list of things you love about your loved one, things that you remember with gratitude.**
- **Make a list of ways that you grew and changed as a result of knowing and loving your loved one.**
- **When you drink your morning beverage, stop and savor the sensations (smell, taste, texture of the cup, sounds, sights) and experience the moment mindfully.**
- **Every night before you fall asleep, list 3 things from your day for which you are grateful.**

Make the Choice to Reengage with Life

Shifting from surviving to thriving is an intentional choice. Deciding to make meaning out of loss and seeing loss in the context of a larger perspective is a daily decision. To reengage with life means risking again, loving again, and moving forward *with* the ever present eternal love of your loved one woven into the fabric of you. We are forever changed through our relationships with our loved ones – and by our grief – but we have the power to embrace life while we still have it.

How:

- **Volunteer your time and services in a cause that is meaningful to you.**
- **When you walk to your car, look up at the sky and say the words, “The spaciousness above is mirrored in the spaciousness within me.”**
- **When you wash your hands, say the words, “I acknowledge a flow in the Universe of which I am a part. I go with the flow.”**
- **Keep your heart open by saying “yes” to life when you are able, knowing that your loved one never wanted you to finish your days with a bitter or broken heart.**
- **Breath is the essence of life. Use this breathing technique to stay grounded: breathe in for the count of 5, hold for the count of 5, and exhale for the count of 5.**

Be patient with your process, as grieving takes time. It might feel as if you are going in circles, but remember that you are actually traveling a spiral path that is always circling higher.

Remember also that love and loss are universal experiences. We are not alone in the process. I hope that these ideas help you on your journey toward *deep healing*.