



5 Action Steps

for dealing with grief

"Joy comes, grief goes, we know not how." James Russell Lowell

Action Step One • Daily Gratuity List

"Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow." Melody Beattie

A daily gratuity list has the power; however, briefly, to steer us away from our cavern of pain by helping us focus, even for a second, on our ability to feel content, to feel pleasure, to feel at peace and to experience joy.

One of the best ways to record and commit to a daily gratuity list is with an actual journal, one dedicated just for these daily lists. I strongly recommend pen to paper: literally writing. Place your journal by your bedside and record your list immediately upon waking. Describe in minute detail what you are grateful for. Latch on to even the smallest of things that bring you joy.

Example: Daily Gratuity List of 3 things I am grateful for

MY MATTRESS: the softness and cushioning of my mattress makes me feel like I am enveloped in a warm cocoon

VITAMIN D CAPSULES: without this supplement I would suffer exponentially more from my seasonal affective disorder

MY PULL-UP BAR I INSTALLED IN MY HOUSE: without this I could not easily continue my commitment to 1 daily pull up

"Gratitude doesn't change the scenery, it merely washes clean the glass you look through so you can clearly see the colors." Richelle E. Goodrich

"It is impossible to feel grateful and depressed in the same moment." Naomi Williams

Action Step Two • Meditation

"Feeling come and go like clouds in a windy sky. Conscious breathing is my anchor." Thich Nhat Hanh

"In the attitude of silence the soul finds the path in a clearer light, and what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness." Mahatma Gandhi

Meditation can help with grief in many ways. Practicing daily meditation can reduce pain, anxiety and stress. My own practice of meditation has taught me how to become aware of my thoughts and feelings and to simply "let them be." I have also learned how not to attach or invest in the myriad of thoughts and emotions that I become aware of while practicing mindfulness. I allow my thoughts and grief to exist, but I practice 'not dwelling' on these thoughts and re-directing my attention to the moment...to my breath.

Getting started with meditation can feel daunting. It may feel like this whole huge world that we know nothing about and that we will have to practice for years to gain any benefit. Nothing could be further from the truth. Simply practicing for 3 minutes every day can bring huge benefits. I recommend guided meditation to begin with. One of the best apps available for smart phones is called Headspace.

"I'm simply saying that there is a way to be sane. I'm saying that you can get rid of all this insanity created by the past in you. Just by being a simple witness of your thought processes.

It is simply sitting silently, witnessing the thoughts, passing before you. Just witnessing, not interfering not even judging, because the moment you judge you have lost the pure witness. The moment you say "this is good, this is bad," you have already jumped onto the thought process.

It takes a little time to create a gap between the witness and the mind. Once the gap is there, you are in for a great surprise, that you are not the mind, that you are the witness, a watcher.

And this process of watching is the very alchemy of real religion. Because as you become more and more deeply rooted in witnessing, thoughts start disappearing. You are, but the mind is utterly empty.

That's the moment of enlightenment. That is the moment that you become for the first time an unconditioned, sane, really free human being." Osho

Action Step Three • Volunteer

"To ease another's heartache is to forget one's own." Abraham Lincoln

"We are like one winged angels. It is only when we help each other that we can fly." Luciano de Crescenzo

Volunteering to help others in need is a great way for us to start to tolerate the depth of our grief. We can focus on stepping away from our pain by helping to strengthen our community and bring joy and relief to others in need.

A great resource for finding and exploring your local volunteering opportunities is the Points of Light Foundations' Volunteer Center National Network (www.pointsoflight.org).

"There is no better exercise for your heart than reaching down and helping to lift someone up." Bernarn Meltzer

Action Step Four • Get Out In Nature

"Nature cures – not the physician." Hippocrates

"One has to be alone, under the sky, Before everything falls into place and one finds his or her own place in the midst of it all. We have to have the humility to realize ourselves as part of nature." Thomas Merton

A recent study <http://www.pnas.org/content/112/28/8567.abstract> published in The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences finds that getting out in nature could lower the risk of depression. Other studies by the same author (Gregory Bratman) have found that nature experience can decrease anxiety and rumination.

Along this same theme, exposing ourselves to nature can increase our mindfulness and presence in the moment....this mindfulness and awareness of the moment can offer us a break from our grief: even if just for a minute. A walk in nature is a concrete way of reaching out our hands and literally touching the world around us. Reconnecting to living things outside our houses: outside our cocoons of grief.

"Above all, do not lose your desire to walk. Every day I walk myself into a state of well-being, And walk away from every illness. I have walked myself into my best thoughts, and I know of no thought so burdensome that one cannot walk away from it." Soren Kierkegaard

Action Step Five • Talk To Someone

"There is no grief like the grief that doesn't speak." Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

"Can I see another's woe, and not be in sorrow too? Can I see another's grief, and not seek for kind relief." William Blake

Whether we talk to our family, our friends, a therapist or a licensed grief counselor verbalizing and sharing our pain is a way of beginning to release this pain. Verbalizing our pain allows other people to soothe us, offer support and share their ideas on what may have helped them in the past.

RESOURCES FOR PET LOSS / GRIEF SUPPORT

Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement

www.aplb.org

Pet Loss Grief Support Website

www.petloss.com

Grief Support Center as Rainbowbridge.com

www.rainbowsbridge.com

Pet Loss Hotline/Rainbow Bridge:

http://rainbowsbridge.com/grief_support_center/Pet_Loss_Resources/petloss_hot_lines.htm

*"Grief knits two hearts in closer bonds than happiness ever can;
and common sufferings are far stronger links than common joys." Alphonse de Lamartine*