

Comforting Friends

Published by Friends for Survival, Inc.

A NATIONAL OUTREACH & SUPPORT ORGANIZATION
FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY A SUICIDE DEATH

2021

JANUARY



RESOLUTIONS WITH RESOLVE

by S. Reynolds, Friends for Survival Member

I was thinking about New Years' Resolutions. I would make a list every January. Some I would accomplish, some I would not. I am a different person now, after losing my loved one to suicide. My resolution list also looks different.

"Resolve" is defined as firm determination to do something. So this year, I am doing my resolutions with resolve...

This year I will...

Continue to let myself heal, and not feel guilty about feeling better.

Feel gratitude about something for a small part of every day.

Take care of myself by exercising so my body can have the strength it will need to help me cope with my grief. Eating well and getting enough sleep.

Cry whenever I need to - tears are healing and necessary.

Give myself grace. And patience. And time.

Practice yoga and meditation, mindfulness. Write in my journal every day.

Donate to my loved one's favorite charities in his honor.

Try and learn something new this year. Take an on-line class.

January: We may be feeling rather tired after the very unusual year of 2020. And...our grief is exhausting. It may be hard to put one foot in front of the other. But we will, together. This newsletter is here to encourage us to focus on our grief as needed. We learn from our past that our lives change, our experiences change, but we are not alone.

Together, we are a community of caring friends committed to offering comfort, encouragement and hope. Together, let's focus on hope for 2021. Please share with me what has helped you this past year and beyond (info@friendsforsurvival.org). Sharing helps us heal. With your permission, I would like to share your thoughts and wisdom with our readers.

Take care of yourself as we take care of each other.



Gratefully,

Marilyn Koenig
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SUPPORT GROUPS

Until further notice, all support group meetings are virtual.

Go to our website, click on **Upcoming, Meetings**. Find your meeting date and time, click on **Register**.

PUBLIC MEETINGS:

Second Monday

January 11 @ 3pm PST

Third Tuesday

January 19 @ 7pm PST

Fourth Wednesday

January 27 @ 7pm PST

PRIVATE CHAPTER MEETINGS:

Legacy Survivors Utah

Wednesday, January 13 @ 6pm MST (5pm PST)

Modesto

Monday, January 18 @ 7pm PST

WEBINARS:

More information and register at: friendsforsurvival.org/our-webinars

Are you interested in starting a grief support program in your area?

For 2021, we have updated our publication: *Pathways to Purpose and Hope: A Guide for Creating A Sustainable Grief Support Organization for Families and Friends After A Suicide Death.*

This is a free, 100-page spiral bound book with all the steps you need to put together your group. Call 916-392-0664, or order on our website under "Shop."

dispelling the misconceptions about suicide and grief and mourning

by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. - www.centerforloss.com



Misconception 3: Grief and mourning progress in predictable, orderly stages. Probably you have already heard about the stages of grief. This type of thinking about dying, grief, and mourning is appealing but inaccurate. The notion of stages helps people make sense of death, an experience that is usually not orderly or predictable. If we believe that everyone grieves by going through the same stages, then death and grief become much less mysterious and fearsome. If only it were so simple!

The concept of "stage" was popularized in 1969 with the publication of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's landmark text *On Death and Dying*. In this important book, Dr. Kübler-Ross lists the five stages of grief that she saw terminally ill patients experience in the face of their own impending deaths: denial; anger; bargaining; depression; and acceptance. However, Dr. Kübler-Ross never intended for her stages to be interpreted as a rigid, linear sequence to be followed by all mourners. Readers, however, have done just that, and the consequences have often been disastrous.

As a grieving person, you will probably encounter others who have adopted a rigid system of beliefs about what you should experience in your grief journey. And if you have internalized this misconception, you may also find yourself trying to prescribe your grief experience as well. Instead of allowing yourself to be where you are, you may try to force yourself to be in another "stage."

Everyone mourns in different ways. Personal experience is your best teacher about where you are in your grief journey. Don't think your goal is to move through prescribed stages of grief. Your grief is unique. That word means "only one." No one ever existed exactly like you before, and no one will ever be exactly like you again. As part of the healing process, the thoughts and feelings you will experience will be totally unique to you.

[Third in a series.]

Thank Me

We can be really hard on ourselves.

To balance feelings of self-criticism and unworthiness, it is really important to remember that fundamentally, **we are actually on our own side.**

A good way to do this is to develop gratitude for yourself, recognizing that so much of what you do is for your own good - even if it doesn't always work out in a way you expected.

Take a few minutes today to close your eyes and thank yourself, because you're doing the best you can.

Source: Mindfulness Cards - Simple Practices for Everyday Life by Mindfulness Everywhere (available at www.chroniclebooks.com)



Like a Tree in Winter

by Pat Dodge

LIKE A TREE IN WINTER WHICH HAD LOST ITS LEAVES, WE LOOK AHEAD TO SPRING FOR NEW GROWTH AND THE WARMTH OF THE SUN TO HEAL THE PAIN IN OUR HEARTS. LET US MAKE JANUARY A TIME TO REACH OUT TO EACH OTHER AND GIVE THAT WARMTH FROM OUR HEARTS, AND IN RETURN WE WILL ALL SHOW NEW GROWTH.

SOURCE: THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, SACRAMENTO



Wallowing Days

by Darci D. Sims, Ph.D.

Though winter seems to have more than its share of less than wondrous days, occasionally we have an especially down day.

Some days aren't too bad. They start out kind of slowly, like a reluctant first grader, but gather momentum as the hours flow by. Some days get a jump-start on me. By the time I hit the shower, I'm functioning without feeling, so much like those early foggy days of grief. Those are the days when hot cocoa and a bowl of steaming oatmeal are the only way to fly. A hot breakfast will make most days seem almost civilized.

Winter days sometimes bring more than cold rain or gloom, and for those days, more than chocolate is needed. Even the sound of the radio is too cheerful a beginning, and shoveling snow or dashing through rain puddles is not the ideal aerobic exercise. It only serves to remind me of my lost youth.

Even before I open my eyes, I can often sense it just might be one of those days. They can mean only one thing to those of us who are struggling through the snowy landscape of The Valley of Grief. Those days are for *wallowing*.

I do not want to get up and be cheerful. I don't even want to get up; who cares about being cheerful? I do not want to eat right (give me chocolate and fat and calories on those days), and I definitely don't want to do anything that might make me feel better! Feeling better is not what I have in mind for the wallowing days of winter.

When a wallowing day hits, all I want to do is hide. I want to stay in bed drawing the covers over my head, snuggling down deep under the quilt, and pretending today isn't happening. And I don't want the radio, the television, the calendar, or anyone to tell me differently.

I don't want a cheery phone call. I don't want a sympathetic hand on my shoulder or an understanding nod of the head either. I don't want anyone to even acknowledge me. I want to be left alone. On the wallowing days, I just want silence and aloneness—the only source of comfort on a wallowing day.

Too many people will try to talk us out of our wallowing mood, but when I'm in one, that is exactly what I don't

want. I want to wallow. I want to grieve. I want to cry and yell and worry and hate. I want to have a temper tantrum and throw things (although I rarely do either). I want to come to a complete stop on my journey and sit down on the curb and cry. Too many people want to love us out of our pain, and I don't even want them to touch me!

It is terribly hard to see someone you love in such distress, but sometimes I think we just might need a day or two of wallowing. It's not so bad, this wandering around in the gloom of the past if we can allow ourselves permission to do so. If we could just relax into the despair we might find it not as bad as we feared.

It is the fear that makes those days so much worse than they really are. We add guilt to our gloom and bring along the anger and impatience of grief to create an even worse day for ourselves. We "should" all over ourselves, almost as punishment for not having a good day. "I should be better by now," and "I shouldn't be feeling this way anymore." Who says so?

The rest of the world might say so, but as long as we are breathing, there will be more than a few of those days waiting for us, waiting to catch us off guard. Just as we are getting settled into a really good wallow, here comes someone to shake us out of our mood. Somebody calls, or we get a note in the mail: "Just thinking of you and wishing you a good day" is enough to make us sick! I want to wallow, please. Not often, but sometimes it is the only thing to do.

We can wallow with the scrapbooks or with the radio playing The Song. We can wallow with cookies or carrots (you've got to be kidding!). We can wallow with our memories or with a movie. We can wallow alone or, as a special treat, with a friend. Wallowing with a friend is truly one of life's little perks.

Wallowing doesn't mean getting lost in the gloom or sinking into despair. It doesn't mean thinking of driving a little too fast or standing a little too close to the edge. It doesn't mean finding the pills or drowning in the bottle. In fact, all of those things keep us from wallowing, just as surely as does the sympathetic but poorly timed pat on the hand.

What we need on wallowing days is understanding, acknowledgment, tolerance, patience, and to be left alone. Sometimes the grief—the pain—is simply too much to bear in the company of others, and I run out of energy to make sure you are okay in the presence of my pain. Sometimes I just have to run headlong into the hurt, embracing it all, because it is all I think I have left of my love. Sometimes wallowing can be the door to sanity as I face squarely the intensity of my pain.

Love sometimes hurts, and to deny that is to deny the joy of being loved. We can't have only half a picture. We need all sides and all dimensions in order to fully understand and embrace the life we are living. Knowing we are alive when our loved one is not is perhaps one of the most difficult steps to be taken in The Valley—to forgive ourselves for living when our loved ones did not live is truly worth a moment or two of wallowing. Since grief is the price we pay for love, and I have been billed for my affections, please allow me the space to repay the debt.

Wallowing is neither dangerous nor easy, but sometimes it is necessary to get in touch with the pain and the despair so we can breathe through it to find the light. Wallowing does not allow for shields or the wearing of a mask. When one wallows, one goes straight into the hurt, claiming it all. Sometimes I just have to indulge my sadness and embrace my pain so I can learn to live beyond it. That's when we can begin to let the joy of our loved one's life begin to take the place of the hurt and pain of their death.

As long as wallowing doesn't get to be a way of life, we're safe to indulge ourselves once in a while. As long as I don't find myself contemplating the height of the bridge or the depth of the valley, then I can allow a day or two of wallowing, especially in the winter when the snow piles deep and the wind brings only a bitter tune.

Wallowing—a moment of reflected pain that speaks so truly of the depth of love. If we had not loved, we would not despair. Sometimes it brings tears, but always it brings memory, and memory isn't such a bad place to dwell in the winter time.

Source: <https://www.taps.org/articles/17-4/winterwallowing>

Support

Friends for Survival

www.friendsforsurvival.org

Phone: (916) 392-0664

Toll Free: (800) 646-7322

If you are in crisis and need immediate help, call the 24 hour National Crisis Line:

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Alliance of Hope

Survivor services including a 24/7 on-line community forum
www.allianceofhope.org

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)

Extensive lists of available meeting support www.afsp.org/find-support

American Association of Suicidology (AAS)

www.suicidology.org

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education

www.save.org

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)

For service members, veterans, and their families: www.taps.org

The Compassionate Friends

For bereaved parents of a deceased child: www.compassionatefriends.org

The National Center for Grieving Children & Families

The Dougy Center
www.dougy.org/grief-resources



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