



Losing Someone Close

by Robert DiGiulio

You are never prepared for the death of a loved one. No matter the circumstances of loss, there is always sadness, heartache, and emptiness.

As you struggle to go on with life after your loved one has died, you face painful questions: How can you handle the anguish of grief? How can you find peace and joy and meaning in life? How can you learn to trust life and love again?

CareNotes[™]

Take One—and take heart.
Give One—and give hope.

Working your way through

One fateful day years ago, a car accident took the lives of my wife, Chrissie, our oldest daughter, Christine, and my wife's parents, who were visiting at the time.

After the accident, in trying to help my two surviving daughters understand what had happened, I realized that I was utterly vacant, unsure, and angry. I experienced deep depression for the first time in my life.

In a real way, though, my need to help Aimee and Katie sort through their feelings and questions helped me sort through my own. Although I have never come up with any simple answers or solutions to the pain of loss, I do have some thoughts about grieving. I hope they will bring you strength and aid as you cope with the loss of your loved one.

■ ***Accept your feelings.*** Whether your loss has come in a swift and dramatic fashion or was long expected, your feelings are no doubt intense and

painful. Along with sadness, you may be hit by a flood of other, sometimes conflicting, feelings: anger, helplessness, fear, guilt, regret, loneliness, despair.

I had to learn to respect these feelings as part of me—a testimony to my intense love and loss. Only when I was able to accept and even embrace such feelings as natural and normal and an integral part of my healing process was I able to work through them.

At times you may want to suppress or avoid your feelings with distractions and busyness. That's understandable, and may even be necessary sometimes, but eventually your emotions will surface; grief will demand your attention. Give it that attention willingly and you will make the process easier.

■ ***Let people know what you need.*** In their efforts to comfort me,

Share with me. Let me laugh. It gives me something to hold on to in the middle of the night when I feel only pain.... Be your happy self—and let me be me. On days when I can laugh, I will. On days when I can speak of my loved one, I need you to share my memories.

—Jacqueline L. Rogers,
*I Want to Help
But I Don't Know How*

well-meaning people sometimes actually caused me discomfort. Their words about “God’s will,” or about how they knew “just how I feel,” or about how things “always work out for the best,” rang hollow. When someone’s attempt to comfort you only deepens the hurt, remind yourself of that person’s good intentions and forgive him or her for not understanding.

“Be open to the pain of your broken heart. God enters through its brokenness.”

—Karen Katafiasz,
Grief Therapy

If you find yourself overwhelmed by life’s daily responsibilities, call on those around you for assistance. Don’t be afraid to ask for what you need—people will respond with amazing generosity. Friends and family often want to help, but don’t know how. If you let them know specific ways they

can help, you will be doing them, as well as yourself, a favor.

■ ***Treasure your relationships.***

Death makes life all the more precious. I felt so fortunate to have my daughters to hold on to through the pain. But I know that many people who lose someone close feel abandoned and alone—as if they have no one or nothing to live for.

If you feel this way, try being with people who are also grieving, in a bereavement support group, for example. As you tell your stories, you will share an understanding of the heart deeper than words. The survival of those who have found healing after loss is reassurance that you, too, can endure.

■ ***Draw on faith for healing.*** You may feel cheated. As you struggle to make sense of your tragedy, reassure yourself

You will grieve, and that is painful. And your grief will have many stages, but all of them will be healing. Little by little, you will be whole again. And you will be a stronger person. Just as a broken bone knits and becomes stronger than before, so will you.

—Lynn Caine
Widow

that it's okay to be angry with God. But also realize that your loss is not God's punishment or an attempt to test you. God shares the hurt in your heart and wants to lead you to new hope and peace.

■ *Be patient with yourself.* Grieving has many stages, which might include shock, numbness, denial, depression, confusion, fear, anger, bitterness, guilt, regret, acceptance, hope. These stages may come in any order, any number of times. Give yourself time to move through grief at your own pace and in your own individual way.

Maybe you feel like you don't have anyone who needs you anymore.

Sources of additional help

Books: *Living When a Loved One Has Died* by Earl A. Grollman, Boston, MA, Beacon Press, 1997. *Life After Loss: Conquering Grief and Finding Hope* by Raymond A. Moody and Dianne Arcangel, San Francisco, CA, HarperSanFrancisco, 2001. *Healing After Loss* by Martha Whitmore Hickman, New York, NY, Avon, 1994.

CareNotes: *Taking the Time You Need to Grieve Your Loss* by Kathlyn S. Baldwin; *Walking With God Through Grief and Loss* by Joyce Rupp; St. Meinrad, IN, Abbey Press Publications.

Whatever personal attributes you have that made you so dear to your loved one are still there, waiting to be tapped to bring joy to others. The world needs the gift of you!

Take heart

The one that you have loved and lost will always be with you, in memory and in prayer.

As impossible as it may seem right now, a time will come when you will be able to think of your loved one, and feel the sacred connection between the two of you, without the pain and emptiness you feel right now. A time will come when you will want to laugh and live and love again.

Let yourself heal—in your own time and your own way. The one that you have loved and lost would want it that way. ■

Dr. Robert DiGiulio was an educator, researcher, 2002 Fulbright Scholar, and prolific author who specialized in a number of areas, including human development, counseling, and bereavement. He died in 2009 at age 59.