

Grieving Multiple Losses

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Grief comes to all of us whether we've lost a friend, family member or beloved pet. It touches our very souls and reminds us of our mortality.

Grieving multiple losses in a short span of time can be daunting, especially if you were close to those who died. The year 2005 saw the death of my mother and three close friends in the span of a few months. My mother was 88 years old and died of old age. Two friends died tragically, one from a brain bleed at age 39, the other 40 something and instantly killed when a heavy tree limb he was cutting struck his head. The third, a childhood friend, died after a long battle with pancreatic cancer.

Having been a Hospice worker for ten years, I thought I had the answers to dealing with loss. I did...for other people. Grieving the loss of several people in a short span of time yourself, is quite different from helping others cope with loss. This grief is achingly personal.

When dealing with multiple loss, it is imperative to acknowledge pain that feels like it's claiming your very being. Trying to be strong for others only delays the inevitable. When you finally acknowledge your loss, the pain is more intense, and can lead to serious illness. Let others comfort you and take care of you. Don't let your tears remain silent. Allow them to flow and heal you. If you don't deal with your grief, it will find a way to deal with you.

Silently thank and bless those who have passed, for their presence in your life. Say something like, "Thank you for being part of my life that is all the richer for your presence. God Bless and God Speed (Name)." Add whatever thoughts and feelings you had about the deceased. This healing prayer acknowledges the impact each person had on your life. When you bless another, you bless yourself as well. This is very comforting and healing.

Talk about your loss. Share favorite moments, jokes or situations with others who may also be grieving. Don't be afraid to laugh at some witticism, embarrassing moment or the person's foibles.

Talk to a grief counselor or join a support group of people who are grieving multiple losses. They know how you feel. Sharing your story can be cathartic for all of you. It also helps relieve feelings of isolation by reminding you that others share your pain.

You will become familiar with the five stages of grief but not necessarily go through them in order. Just go with it and feel what you feel. Understand that your feelings are a normal part of the grieving and healing process. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Everyone grieves in their own way. Remember, grief has no time limit. One day you might feel angry, the next depressed, then back to anger. You might try bargaining or not. As you swing to and from each phase, you will eventually arrive at acceptance. Feel what you feel until time has its way.

This is the time to nurture and be gentle with yourself. Be sure your diet is nutritious, and you get the proper amount of rest. Listen to one of the many meditation tapes on the market designed to relax you and quiet your mind.

People handling multiple losses have a tendency to isolate themselves. They may go to their jobs and perform routine chores, but beyond that choose to grieve alone. Spending time with family and friends is most important to the healing process.

Finally, remember that nothing lasts forever. While you will always miss your loved one, tears eventually dry and memories become a source of comfort.