

Finding Balance in Your Grieving

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The death of your spouse most likely turned your whole world upside down ... out of balance. Everything seemed to change in your life ... especially you. Your belief system, physical routines such as sleep, energy and eating, emotional stability, relationships ... even your environment has taken on a different meaning. That feeling of safety, comfort and familiarity about your life no longer seems to exist.

Grieving is a difficult journey, as you already know. In the process you and your life will change. Learning to re-create a sense of *balance* is essential. Balance assists the healing process and maintains emotional, spiritual and physical health and stability.

An architect needs a blueprint to build a new masterpiece. A ship's captain needs a compass and maps to reach his destination safely. As you build a new identity and life, you too can benefit from a "*blueprint*" or guide to creating balance in your life. I have created such a "*map*", an acronym "**S.P.A.C.E.**", which represents balance and stands for all the areas in which we spend time in our lives. If you learn to create balance around and within you, you can feel good about life again.

S: Spiritual – How do you spend time with your soul?

Maybe you are questioning your spirituality or religious beliefs and this may feel like a difficult area ... one of confusion, anger, emptiness and possibly representing

another loss. “If there were a God, why would he allow this to happen?” As you walk through the grieving process, you can find answers in many ways.

- Seek professional help through therapy or religious counseling.
- Plan ways to ease your soul and find some peace ... sunsets, walks in nature, gardening; service to others, spending time with children; listen to nurturing music; practiced meditation and deep breathing exercises.
- Prayer – sometimes it’s nice to share your thoughts without getting advice and judgments.
- Begin a journal – write about one blessing that you have each day. Blessings are often “*small*” things that we take for granted, like our health, food and shelter. Everyone has blessings. You just need to acknowledge them.

P: Physical – how do you spend time with your body?

With your loss, your entire being may feel as though it has been traumatized. Physically, your strength and energy may have declined, leaving you feeling weak and exhausted. Along with depression and grieving, many of our physical habits are changed: SLEEP, you may experience insomnia, many awakenings or not wanting to wake up or get out of bed; APPETITE, you may be eating very little or wanting to stuff down all those feelings by eating too much, causing a loss or gain in normal weight; and, ENERGY, you may feel like you have to drag yourself to do even the smallest task, or maybe you keep extremely busy so you won’t have to feel.

This is the time to be aware of your body's needs and to nurture it back to health and balance. Nurture your body and the awareness and feelings will follow.

- Exercise. This is a well-documented way to lift depression and energy. Walking for 20 – 30 minutes three times a week is a great beginning. (If you have health problems, confer with your doctor.)
- Get outside. The natural Vitamin D from sunshine (in moderation) profoundly affects hormonal balance.
- Get a massage. Touch is often terribly missed after the loss of a spouse.
- Take a yoga class. Yoga poses improve blood circulation, which could improve your energy and feelings of lethargy.
- Deep breathing and meditation. Both help to lower anxiety and improve much needed sleep.
- Aromatherapy can alter brain chemistry right through your nose! Lavender, for example, induces restfulness for many.

A: Affect –How do you spend time with your feelings?

Affect is a psychological term for the range of ups and downs of your everyday feelings. You may feel as though you are no longer interested in pleasurable activities. That is normal. Do things to nurture and honor your feelings.

- Be around positive, supportive people. That's why bereavement support groups are so important.

- Honor your feelings—there is healing in tears. If you find that you “can’t cry,” know that it may be time or maybe your tears have already been shed. Don’t judge them. Just let them be.
- Music can be a very healing therapy. Listen to music that you like. Slow and relaxing music can help you calm down and sleep better. It can also lift your spirits and let you sing.
- Seek professional help if you feel stuck or the pain is just too intense. It doesn’t mean that you are weak or “crazy,” rather in more pain than you can get through alone.
- Commune with nature. Visit the mountains, seashore or sit in your garden. Nature has a way of healing and lifting your spirits.
- Give yourself permission to laugh. It doesn’t take away from the grieving process. It honors the memory of your spouse and the life that you had together.

C: Cognitive – How do you spend your time with your thoughts?

Your thoughts are a very important part of the healing process that can either impede or support healthy grieving. Often, it is difficult to “turn off” your thoughts ... fears about the future, memories about the past and anxious thoughts about what you will possibly do without your spouse by your side.

The way that we *think* affects the way that we *feel* which affects our *behavior* and the way that we *perceive* the world (i.e., “*I’ll always be alone now.*” = feelings of

sadness, hopelessness = a behavior of staying home alone = a perception that the world is a lonely place).

Be aware of your thoughts and begin to learn to “reprogram” them to support your healing process, (i.e., “*I feel lonely since my spouse died, but I’ll get through this with the help of others.*” = feelings of hope and support = the behavior of going to a bereavement support group = a perception that you are not alone in this world).

- Begin to use “affirmations” (positive statements about yourself) such as “*I am a strong, loving person who will survive.*”
- Utilize a therapist to identify and change your thoughts.
- Write your thoughts in a journal. You’ll begin to see patterns and have a place to express your feelings.
- Take a class such as art, music or history, to expand your thinking.

E: Environment – How do I spend time in my environment?

Think about your environment, such as pets, plants, light, music, garden, pictures, people, etc. The way that we mold our environment has an effect on the way that we feel and think. Create your environment to work for you in this healing process, not against you. If a sad song comes on the radio that causes you distress, it’s okay to turn the knob to find a station that is uplifting.

- Clean up the clutter. If need be, have a friend or a professional organizer assist you. “*Clutter creates confusion.*” Right now you have enough confusion in your life.

- If you like spending time outdoors in nature, remember to do that. Often we sit inside in front of the TV or staring out the window. Energy follows energy. You need to move your energy and eventually more energy will follow.
- Be with positive people that you enjoy and like.
- Go places that you enjoy and/or feel safe (i.e., art museums and theater, a favorite park, temple or church).
- Music can be positively distracting and nurturing.

Think about the five areas of **S.P.A.C.E.:** **Spiritual, Physical, Affect, Cognitive and Environment.** Write “S. P.A.C.E.” vertically on a piece of paper and write your own ideas or activities in each of the five areas. This will become *your* “blueprint” to rebalancing your life. Plan to include something from each area of your life on a weekly basis. Eventually, one step at a time, one day at a time, *your* life will again begin to have balance and you will begin to heal.

*The captain of a ship can't embark without
first knowing his destination.*

*Otherwise,
no matter if he has the most
sophisticated ship ever made,
he's going to end up lost*

Note: This article has been published in the the book:

- “The Healing Power of Grief: The Journey through Loss to Life and Laughter”
Gloria Lintermans and Marilyn Stolzman, Ph.D., L.M.F.T.
(Champion Press, March 2006)

