

Understand the six needs of mourning

From "Healing your Grieving Heart" by Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD
Adapted for children in care

1. Acknowledge the reality of the loss.

- ~gently confront yourself
- ~it may occur over weeks and months (this is ok)
- ~acknowledge your loss with your head and then your heart
- ~keep in mind that integration comes in doses, as you are ready

Tell someone about the loss today. This will help you work on this important need.

2. Embrace the pain of the loss.

- ~we don't naturally want to do this -- it's easier to avoid
- ~this is how you learn to reconcile yourself to it
- ~dose yourself on embracing your pain as you need to -- you can't do it all at once.

Reach out and spend time with someone who doesn't try to take your pain and sense of loss away.

3. Remember the person who's gone.

- ~he/she stays on through our memories
- ~actively remember and commemorate the good things you remember; it's healthy
- ~never let someone else try to take your memories away (trying to help you); it's good for you to continue to display those pictures.
- ~remembering the past makes hoping for the future possible.

Brainstorm a list of characteristics or memories of the person who's gone. Write as fast as you can for ten minutes, then put away the list for future reflection.

4. Develop a new self-identity.

- ~part of who you are was formed by the relationship you had with that person who is gone.
- ~the way you defined yourself and the way society defines you has changed (ex: to foster kid, adoptive kid, etc.)
- ~re-anchor yourself, reconstruct your self-identity. This is long and hard work.
- ~you may discover some positive changes as you work on this (more caring, less judgmental, more strong)

Write this statement down: I used to be _____. Now that _____, I am _____. This makes me feel _____.

5. Search for meaning.

- ~naturally you will question the meaning and purpose of life (particularly this one that you are now grieving).
- ~Why and How questions may surface uncontrollably. (Why did this happen? How will I go on?)
- ~question philosophy of life, explore different religions and spiritualities
- ~"Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted." Even if you have faith, you still need to mourn.

Write down a list of 'why' questions that have come up for you since the death. Go through them with a friend or counselor who won't feel she has to give you all the answers.

6. Receive ongoing support from others.

- ~we need the love and understanding of others to heal.
- ~don't feel ashamed of your dependence right now; revel knowing others care for you.
- ~society places too much value on "doing well" and "carrying on" that we lose support too soon.
- ~grief is a process not an event. You will need support for weeks, months and years.

Friends want to help but don't know how. Call them and tell them you'll need help in the coming weeks.