



DURAL LEGAL
CENTRE

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HEALING

We all feel pain when we lose a love or something precious to us, but there are positive steps you can take to aid the healing process. I hope that this guide will help you to overcome your sorrow and grief and show you that there ARE things to do when you think nothing can be done.

LOSS is one of the most common and painful of human experiences. When you lose someone or some thing, nothing will stop you hurting. And you wouldn't want it to anyway, because hurt is essential to recovery. In addition to the obvious losses such as the death of a loved one, or the breakup of a marriage or the discovery of an affair, there are plenty of other situations where we feel that we've lost something precious – it could be the loss of a job or an investment, moving house, rape, robbery, a change of lifestyle or even illness. Then there are losses related to age such as leaving home, leaving school, loss of youth, looks and sex drive, menopause and retirement.

If you believe that there is nothing you can do at times like these you're wrong. There are positive actions you can take to help you survive and to encourage healing. Don't be afraid to seek professional help if you need it. But in times of stress or when you feel you're no longer in control don't turn to alcohol or drugs – they are definitely NOT the answer.

Along with feelings of depression and sadness, loss provokes other less expected reactions, including: -

- Feeling helpless, fearful, empty, despairing, pessimistic, irritable, angry, guilty, or restless;
- Experiencing a loss of concentration, hope, motivation or energy;
- Undergoing change in appetite, sleeping patterns or sex drive;
- A tendency to fatigue easily, be more prone to errors or to slower speech and movement.

Any or all of these feelings are part of the body's natural healing processes. Accept these changes and realise that the pain will pass, and that when it does you will be happier, more sensitive and more aware. There are three stages of recovery from loss and you will experience them all. They are:

- Shock and denial;
- Anger and depression;
- Understanding and acceptance.

Here is how you can cope: -

- ❖ Accept the loss. You can expect to be in shock for a while, and this emotional numbness may be frightening. You may struggle both to believe and to disbelieve that this is happening to you. But it HAS happened to you, and you ARE strong enough and you WILL survive. Remaining distraught for a long period of time is not proof that you “really loved”, so don't feel duty bound to feel pain for longer than it's really there. Get on with your life as soon as you can!
- ❖ Hurt is normal. Admit that you're hurting, because to feel pain after a loss is proof that you are alive. It is a sign that you are able to respond to life's experiences. Although you may be frightened by your pain, accept it, feel it, deal with it. Don't deny it or cover it up, hurt for a while. Your pain is not endless.
- ❖ Remember that you are not alone. Everyone experiences loss - it is a part of life, of being alive, of being human. Your task is to make the journey from immediate loss to eventual gain as rapidly, smoothly and comfortably as possible. And somehow the camaraderie of mutual suffering eases the pain, so share with your relatives and friends – they feel the pain too!
- ❖ Remember that you are a special, individual, worthwhile human being. You're more than OK – you're great! Your self-esteem may have suffered a jolt, and your thoughts may be full of guilt, worry, condemnation and self-deprecation. But those thoughts are just symptoms of the stress you are going through – don't believe them!
- ❖ Don't punish yourself with “IF ONLY” or “I WISH” I did or didn't do this or that. Don't dwell on what might have been. Beneath the surface you are much, much more than the emotional wound you are currently suffering.
- ❖ You will get better – the healing process has a beginning, a middle and an end. Keep in mind that the end is not far off, and give yourself a chance to heal. Nature is on your side, and nature is a powerful ally.

- ❖ Remember that life is full of positive experiences, and that many positive experiences have yet to come. Tomorrow is almost here.
- ❖ Get lots of rest – NOW! Sleep more, and arrange your day so that you get time to rest. Go gently, and don't rush around too much, but do as much productive work as is comfortable.
- ❖ Your body needs energy to repair it, so rest your emotions as well. Avoid “on the rebound romances” and don't become “heavily involved” for a while.
- ❖ However it's OK to need comforting, so accept understanding and support from family, friends and co-workers. An emotional wound is real, it is disabling, and it is painful. Be brave enough to accept help from others and especially from health professionals.
- ❖ Surround yourself with things that are alive, such as plants or animals. Don't isolate yourself from life, embrace it.
- ❖ Re-affirm any beliefs in which you have faith, whether religious or philosophical. Use any body of knowledge you find comforting – re-explore it, grow from it, enjoy it.
- ❖ Don't dwell on suicidal thoughts. Yours may not be as eloquent as Hamlet's “to be or not to be” but thoughts of self harm may arise. They are a natural symptom of the pain and the feeling will pass. But if you are afraid that these impulses are getting out of hand, seek professional help at once!
It is perfectly all right to feel rage – after all an outrageous thing has happened to you – but don't turn that rage against yourself. Find a safe way to let the rage out. Beat a pillow, cry, scream, stamp, yell. But remember that suicide is pointless – it's like walking out on the opera during the overture just because the conductor dropped the baton. Your anger will dissipate in time and you WILL get better. Much better.
- ❖ Do your mourning NOW - everything else can wait. An emotional wound requires the same priority as a physical wound, so set time aside for mourning. Allow your body to go through its natural stages of repair, or grief will return to haunt you months or even years later.
- ❖ Be gentle with yourself. Accept the fact that you need time to heal, and don't take on new responsibilities. Avoid situations where you might over-react and above all don't blame yourself for any “mistakes” - whether real or imagined - you believe may have contributed to or caused your loss.

- ❖ If it's over, let it go! Don't try to rekindle the old relationship. Futile attempts at reconciliation are painful, delay the healing process, prevent growth, and are a waste of valuable energy. The most difficult task you face might be to give up this final hope, and it is never easy. But invest your energies in healing and growing, in new relationships and in life.
- ❖ If you find photographs and mementos helpful to the healing process, use them. If they bind you to a dead past, get rid of them. But don't rush the decision in case you regret it later.
- ❖ It's OK to feel depressed. Pretending to have more energy or enthusiasm or happiness than you actually have is not productive. Crying has a special use – it is cleansing and a marvellous release.
- ❖ It's OK to feel anger. Everyone gets angry at the loss of love – yes, EVERYONE. And it's OK to feel anger towards the person who left you even if they left you through death. It's OK to feel anger towards the person who took your loved one or your possession away. It's OK to feel angry with fate, and with the social conventions or customs that contributed to your loss.
But it's NOT OK to hate yourself or to act upon your anger in a destructive way. Let the anger out safely – you can hit a pillow, jump on the bed, yell and scream (when alone and with the windows closed), play tennis or football or whack a punching bag or play the piano full crescendo. If you channel your anger in a harmless but helpful way it will dissipate and you'll avoid unnecessary arguments and accidents.
- ❖ Beware of the rebound. Nature abhors a vacuum, and you may find yourself rushing prematurely into romantic attachments in an attempt to fill that grinding emptiness. But if your healing hasn't been completed, that initial rebound is more likely than not to result in another loss, followed by a second rebound and a further loss. You'll find that your emotional life is being lived in the ricochet pattern of a squash court.
- ❖ Under-indulge in addictive activities. Beware of anything you may be or become addicted to. Don't run away or hide from the pain. Alcohol may numb the pain momentarily, but it is a depressant and you're already depressed enough.
Drugs interfere with the natural healing process and only delays and increases the eventual crash into depression. Calorie junkies may tend to overeat, put on weight and lower your self esteem even more. And smoking is never good for you, but is definitely the wrong crutch now!

- ❖ Pamper yourself. Unlike those with a physical wound, you are expected to turn up at work the next day and function as efficiently as ever. You must deal with a world that simply does not acknowledge emotional pain as disabling. The answer is to pamper yourself.
- ❖ Growing is good. As you continue to heal you will find your thinking is sharper, your judgement is more reliable, your concentration has improved, your view of the world is less self-preoccupied and your feelings are more alive. You'll feel stronger and more independent.
- ❖ Forgive the other person. Whenever you can, as soon as you can, forgive them and forgive yourself too! You are a better person for having loved – you cared, you became involved, you shared. You have learned.
- ❖ Remember that a new chapter in your life is now underway. You will have to make the changes this new chapter demands of you. This might be a good time to start experimenting with new lifestyles and new ways of filling your day to day needs.
- ❖ Solitude can be your friend. As you heal, you can be comfortable again when alone. Enjoying time with yourself is a necessary prerequisite to genuinely appreciating time spent with others.
- ❖ You have the freedom to choose now! You're in control of your life, so bring order back into your world. Make the most of your new ability to choose where, what, how, when and who.

And finally, a hug for a job well done. You've suffered the loss, and you've survived. You've experienced shock and denial, endured anger and depression, and found understanding and acceptance.

You've made it! Congratulations!



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5/500 Old Northern Road, Round Corner, NSW

Phone: (02) 9653 9666