

# Dealing with Loss

By Rev. Tres Adames, MDiv, BCPC

I remember the first time I moved away from home. It was my freshman year in college when I made the trek from Arizona to Kentucky to attend Asbury University. I was excited about starting college, but was going to miss my family who would be 1,800 miles away. Even though exciting things were happening, I was temporarily losing something — constant contact with my family and the familiarity of how my life used to be at home.

## **Grief comes with loss and change.**

Whenever we think of grief, we think of the sadness that accompanies the death of a loved one. In reality, grief occurs whenever we lose something important to us. While the death of a family member certainly fits the bill, it could be the loss of a relationship through a breakup or divorce, or the loss of a job. Grief also encompasses the change that comes as a result of the loss. Things are no longer as comfortable and we are forced to adjust. Even good things like marriage and the arrival of children means the end of a former way of life that was familiar.

## **How do we get over it?**

There are healthy ways to grieve but also things we do that may get in the way of healthy grieving. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Try not to ignore it.  
Pretending the events didn't occur, and denying the impact it has had on us will only postpone the inevitable need to confront the loss. We need to move through the pain by expressing it through healthy avenues (more on this later).
- Try not to numb it.  
Avoiding the pain through substances like alcohol or drugs, or even trying to remain busy, can also prolong the process. Trying to numb the pain doesn't allow us to eventually accept the loss. This acceptance is necessary in order to move forward with the loss through the next phase of life.
- Try not to short-circuit the process.  
Changing our circumstances too quickly to avoid the pain of a loss can create problems later. Transition is needed, but moving things along prematurely can be unwise. Some people feel the need to jump from one relationship to another in order to escape. Newly-formed stepfamilies can have major issues if things are moving too quickly. This happens if both parents (and kids in the mix) have personal baggage they haven't dealt with.

## How to Grieve

The only way to get over grief *is to grieve*. Grief is the most complex series of emotions we humans are capable of experiencing. There is no time table for grief. The only way to get through it is to feel it, experience it, and eventually accept it. Some ways to process grief:

- Talk about it.  
Find some close friends that you can open up to. If you don't have a community of people you can connect with, consider seeing a counselor, joining a small group, or signing up for an online support group.
- Express it.  
Put your feelings to paper through journaling. Listen to music that expresses but also encourages your heart. Draw, paint, and do whatever you can to help process your grief.
- Cry.  
There is no need to feel guilty about feeling sad. Let yourself cry but try to not cry alone. Cry with a friend, or if you are a person of faith, cry out to God — try praying your tears.

## Grief is beautiful.

During my first semester in college, I finally did feel better about living so far from home. What was harder was the fact that two people in my family died during my second month there — my great-grandmother and my cousin who was like a sister to me. It was hard to grieve so far from my family, but comfort came through several phone calls, some talks with my pastor, and the support of those around me.

As I look back, I still feel sad whenever I think about my cousin, Nichole. I realize she's in a better place, but there is still a sadness that remains. And that's okay. It's more like a beautiful sorrow. Feeling loss means you had something that gave you joy to begin with. Grief is difficult but it doesn't negate joy. It makes you human, and makes you feel alive.

Every deep cut leaves a scar. You *will* feel much better eventually — but there may always remain a remnant of sadness. Such experiences nurture a compassion for others going through the same thing — which is exactly what they'll need in the midst of their own loss. You can be the very presence of God to them during a time when you wish you had the same.

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