

What Grievers Can/Cannot Do

From Transcending Loss, by Ashley Davis Bush LCSW

What Grievers Cannot Do:

Get Over It -- Although stoicism is often admired, it is not healthy for grievers. The truth is that a major loss is devastating -- physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Grievers don't simply "get over" such a life-altering experience as one might get over an illness. Grief is a necessary, ongoing journey that fluctuates over time. Grief has no closure.

Forget Their Loved One -- Grievers cannot and should not pretend as if their loved one never existed. Most grievers think of their beloved one daily, no matter how many years have gone by. If you, as a friend, never mention the loved one who has died, you are acting as if you've forgotten.

Move On -- Grievers are often told to "move on" with life. It is impossible to move on as if nothing has changed when the foundation of one's life has been shattered. Severing a tie to a deceased loved is not possible, nor should it be the goal (see "Moving Forward" in the next section).

Be Their Old Self Again -- Grievers are irrevocably changed. They cannot return to being their old selves again. They are no longer the same person after a major loss.

Stop Hurting -- Grievers and their loved ones often wish for the pain of grief to stop. The hard truth is that painful feelings of grief will arise again and again over the years. They will continue to "burst" into life at the most inopportune moments. Sometimes a holiday or anniversary will stimulate renewed pain and, at other times, a simple rainy Tuesday is all that it will take.

What Grievers Can Do:

Integrate Loss Into Life -- Grievers must live with loss, but they do have the choice to reengage with life. The way to begin this lies in the understanding that loss is an inevitable part of life and that their loved one is always with them in their heart.

Move Forward -- Grievers may not be able to simply "move on," but they can "move forward" as a changed person with a willingness to accept the many facets of being alive. When grievers move forward they do so with their loved one ever in their memory, their heart, and their spirit.

Remember and Stay Connected in Love -- Grievers can make it a practice to honor their loved one and stay connected to them. They can keep journals and letters written to their loved ones, display photographs and speak about them. Grievers are still in relationship to their loved one even though their physical form is no longer on this planet.

Embrace a New Self -- Grievers can understand that being forever changed means that while the old self has died, a new self is emerging. This new self has the potential for increased strength, wisdom, compassion, insight, and perspective.

Channel Their Pain Into New Energy -- The human spirit is remarkably resilient. Grievers can pour their pain into new life missions, causes, and callings. They may reach out with compassion and understanding to others who suffer. Grievers have a choice to transcend their loss by making meaning out of unspeakable pain.