



# Caring for Yourself as You Grieve

# Your Own Journey of Grief

The death of a loved one begins a domino effect of colliding emotions and bewildering changes. Many demands are made on you, on your time, and on your energy. It's difficult to know where to turn first.

In the midst of taking care of others who need you, your mind is reeling, and your own heart is broken.

Caring for yourself after the death of a loved one is a major struggle.

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“When we mourn, we die to something that gives us a sense of who we are. Grief becomes a chronic bitter taste. The way through suffering is not to deny it, but to live fully in the midst of it.”

—*Henri Nouwen*

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We have learned from adults and children at the Caring Place that everyone's journey of grief is personal and unique.

Your grief is unique. No one can tell you how to grieve, and no one can tell you the right way to care for yourself in your grief.

You'll discover your own way on your own journey of grief, and you'll discover your own ways of taking care of yourself in the midst of your grief.

In fact, realizing that your grief journey is your very own and no one else's is one way of taking care of yourself in your grief.

Many people will have well-intentioned advice about how we should grieve—advice which is often a subtle attempt of taking away our grief and our journey.

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“I did not get over the loss of my loved ones; rather, I absorbed the loss into my life, like soil receives decaying matter, until it became a part of who I am. Sorrow took up permanent residence in my soul and enlarged it. I learned gradually that the deeper we plunge into suffering, the deeper we can enter into a new, and different, life.”

—*Gerald Sittser*

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In the end, we each have to discover for ourselves how to care for ourselves in our grief. What things to do and what not to do. Which people to be with and which people to avoid.

Remembering that you have to discover your own way, and that there is no right or wrong way to grieve—or no right or wrong way to take care of yourself in your grief—are all ways of taking care of yourself in your grief.

“This is my journey. I am the one who knows what I've lost. I am the one left to live this life. And I have to discover what's possible for me.”

—*Caring Place participant*

“I am the only one who knows my grief, my feelings, my loss. And I have to discover what will help me on my journey. You can support me, but you can't give me the answer.”

—*Caring Place participant*

## Experiencing and Expressing Your Grief

One of the ways you care for yourself is by feeling and expressing your grief.

You cannot get to the other side without going through the door—the fiery door of grief.

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“The best way is always through.”

—*Robert Frost*

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Feeling your grief—feeling your sadness, your anger, your pain, your broken-heartedness, your loneliness, your fear—is a way of taking care of yourself. Because the only way through the grief is to grieve.

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“Tears are a visible testament to the enormity of loss. They are not cause for shame, and are never to be discouraged or ridiculed. Stress causes imbalance, and crying restores it. Not crying does not make the tension go away. Yet many of us spend a large amount of time trying to hide our tears and sadness.”

—*Dr. Frederic Flach*

*Clinical Psychologist at Cornell University*

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“I thought ‘being strong’ meant not crying, not showing emotion. What came to me is that real strength is in the letting it out, in the expressing of all the feelings that are there.”

—*Caring Place participant*

## Compassion for Yourself

Coping with the emotions of grief as well as the changes that death brings can be overwhelming. You can give yourself permission to do less, to let some things go, to expect less from yourself.

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“Grief is heavy. It can wear us down. It’s okay to be gentle with ourselves when we’re going through change and grief. We do not have to expect more from ourselves than we can deliver at this time. We do not even have to expect as much from ourselves as we would normally and reasonably expect.”

—*Melody Beattie*

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The energy that it takes to grieve will legitimately reduce what you are able to do—physically and mentally—so it’s OK to adjust your own self-expectations accordingly.

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“Compassion for myself is the most powerful healer of them all.”

—*Theodore Isaac Rubin*

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“I felt like I had to put on the mask of ‘doing OK,’ ‘feeling fine.’ But it took a lot of energy always play-acting like that. I realized that I just needed to let me be myself, to give myself time to heal.”

—*Caring Place participant*



## Connecting With Others

Children, teens and adults at the Caring Place have taught us not only that everyone's journey of grief is personal and unique, they have also taught us of the importance of "grief companions" who accompany us on our journeys.

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"You alone can do it, but you cannot do it alone."

—*O. Hobart Mowrer*

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While no one can take away our grief, or walk our journeys for us, we don't have to walk the road of grief alone.

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"Trouble is a part of your life, and if you don't share it, you don't give the person who loves you a chance to love you enough."

—*Dinah Shore*

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Expressing our grief, sharing our feelings with someone who listens and accepts those feelings, can help us to manage our grief, to help make the grief more bearable.

"Confronting our feelings and giving them appropriate expression always takes strength, not weakness. It takes strength to face our sadness and to grieve and to let our grief and our anger flow in tears when they need to. It takes strength to talk about our feelings and to reach out for help and comfort when we need it."

—*Fred Rogers*

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Those who care for us can provide the support and nurturing we need when they're available to listen to and empathize with us. Realizing that we can't do this on our own, and seeking help, is not a sign of weakness. It's a sign of strength.

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"You don't heal from the loss of a loved one because time passes; you heal because of what you do with the time."

—*Carol Crandall*



"I needed to be with others who were grieving, because they helped me to see that my grief could become manageable one day. They gave me hope that my life would once again include a connectedness to others and to life, a connectedness that I thought had been permanently severed."

—*Caring Place participant*

"No one can give us back what we lost, but together, we can get to tomorrow."

—*14-year-old Caring Place participant*

# About the Highmark Caring Place

The Highmark Caring Place is dedicated to making a difference in the lives of grieving children.

It is the mission of the Highmark Caring Place:

- To raise awareness of the needs of grieving children
- To provide programs to address those needs
- To equip the community to support those children who have experienced the death of a loved one



is a program of



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