

ACKNOWLEDGING YOUR LOSS

One of the first responsibilities we face with grief is to accept the reality of our loss.

Many people find they come to despise the word "accept" when it comes to grief. It has connotations of being okay with the death, or quickly moving on from the person we lost. You will need help with ways to accept your loss without the horrible feeling you are betraying your loved one's memory. We will come initially to see acceptance more as acknowledgment. Acceptance will come gradually.



I know my friend is gone. I was there. I talked to his family. I went to her service. I read the posts on social media. I know it happened. *But I just cannot believe it is real.* My brain has no trouble with the facts, but my heart will not accept that I will never see him again. The primary loss or death of a friend or sibling will be followed by waves of secondary losses just like the crashing of a boulder in a lake sends cascading waves across the water, one after another. It is these secondary losses that make the primary one so painful. Each is an agonizing reminder that we have lost so much. Acknowledgment of these losses are baby steps toward healing.

Exercise

Take out a sheet of paper and place it in a landscape orientation in front of you. Draw an arrow from left to right to across the page and write your loved one's name at the top of the page. Starting at the far left mark a place on the line representing your first memory of your sibling or friend. Move along the line creating marks on the line and labeling them as events, memories, seasons, or moments between you. Mark and label as many as you can remember, all the way to the time of their death on the far right. Above the line write a phrase or sentence describing what you like about that memory. Below the line and that same memory write what you have lost in losing your person.

This exercise helps you honor and appreciate your loved one while at the same time acknowledging why you feel so much pain. As you describe what you have loved and lost in your person there will be a corresponding pain associated with the loss. The recognition of your loss and the related pain allows you the opportunity to come to terms with what you are experiencing.

When you complete the exercise, take some time over the next few days to write down what you were thinking, feeling and doing with regard to the exercise and your memories of your loved one. You will

have a deeper understanding of what you are going through, and your thoughts, feelings and behaviors will be validated. As you become more familiar with the connection of your memories, losses, and grief experience, you will then be able to see how this loss will affect your life moving forward. The reality begins to establish itself in your thoughts, habits and daily routines as you adjust to the change.

The pain of your loss will at times interrupt this process, and you will feel the overwhelm of emptiness, loneliness, abandonment, sadness, and even hopelessness. Hold tight to your memories of your experiences together and allow them to shape you in positive ways. You have the power to create meaning from the huge loss you have experienced.

Choose to be the best version of the person your friend or sibling thought you were.

