

STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH GRIEF

The process of grieving is like going on a “journey.” There are multiple routes and people progress at different rates. There is no right way to grieve, no one path to take, no best coping approach. These grief coping strategies list some of the pathways that others have taken in their journey of grieving. It is not meant to be a measure of how well you have coped or how you should cope, since there is no one way to manage the pain following the aftermath of the loss of a loved one, no matter what the cause of his or her death. Rather, the strategies listed are suggestions of things you might consider doing to help you on your journey.

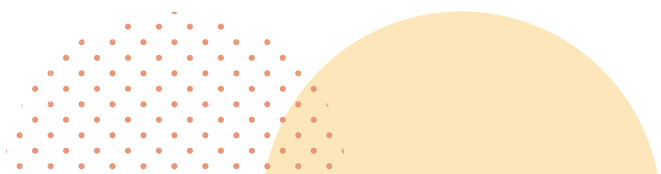
I suggest that you look through this list and put a mark by the coping strategies that you’ve tried. Hopefully, these strategies have helped you. But if you feel that you could use a little extra help, I suggest that you look through the list and then choose some new items that you would like to try. You may find them helpful, and you can add them to the strategies that you’ve already tried. This list is intended to help you discover new ways that you can move forward on your journey through the process of grief. If there are things you have done that you have found helpful that are not on this list of coping strategies, please add them at the end so I can share these with others!

SOUGHT COMFORT AND HELP FROM OTHERS

1. I examined the thoughts that kept me from seeking help from others, such as the beliefs that “I am a burden to others,” “No one can help me, no one understands,” “I have to do this on my own,” “I should be stronger,” “Listening to the grieving stories of others will make me feel worse,” or “People are tired of hearing about my loss.”
2. I reached-out to family, friends, elders, or colleagues for comfort and companionship, but gave myself permission to back-off when I needed time alone.
3. I took the initiative to reach-out to folks from whom I might not normally seek help. I looked for new friends in church groups, social groups, work, school, or I went on the internet to find others who experienced a similar loss. I made a list of these supports to turn to when I was struggling or experiencing pain.
4. I forced myself to be with people and to do things, even when I didn't feel like it. I put something on my calendar almost every day, with back-up plans.
5. I allowed myself to tell people how much I loved, admired, and cared for them.
6. I hugged and held others, but felt free to tell people when I did not want to be touched.
7. I learned to grieve and mourn in public.
8. I shared my story with others who I thought would appreciate and benefit from it. I told anyone who would listen to the story of the deceased, even if they had nothing to say back.
9. I gave and received random acts of kindness.
10. I connected with animals and nature, for example, the deceased's pet, a beautiful sunset, hike, or garden.
11. I cared for or nurtured others. For example I spent time caring for my loved ones or children.

SOUGHT COMFORT AND HELP FROM OTHERS

12. I found my faith or religion comforting. I participated in religious, cultural, or ethnic mourning practices, such as attending church services, sitting Shiva, participating in a Wake, celebrating the Day of the Dead, visiting a memorial shrine, etc.
13. I sought help from organized supportive bereavement groups, hospices, religious groups, grief retreats, talking circles, or groups specific to the way the deceased died, such as cancer support groups or survivors of violent loss groups, such as suicide or homicide.
14. I sought help from mental health professionals. For instance, attended counseling sessions or took medications as advised by my providers.
15. I read books written by others who have coped with the loss of a loved one. I read about the grieving process, loss, and advice books about other issues that arose.
16. I made a list of all the professional resources that I could use in a crisis, such as suicide hotlines, mental health crisis lines, mentors, clergy or imam, or mental health providers.
17. I decided not to walk through the grieving process alone, so I visited websites that focus on the grieving process



TOOK CARE OF MYSELF EMOTIONALLY AND PHYSICALLY

18. I examined the thoughts and feelings that kept me from taking care of myself physically and emotionally, such as guilt, shame, sense of lost self, and loss of the will to live.

19. I established routines of daily living. Although things were different, I made new routines and did not berate myself when I was not “perfect.” I maintained personal hygiene, medical care, healthy nutrition, and regular sleep.

20. I reconnected with my body through exercise, yoga, Tai Chi, or expressive arts, allowing myself time to get stronger.

21. I recognized that my brain needed time to heal and for things to improve, so I forgave myself when I made mistakes, became distracted, couldn’t remember or understand.

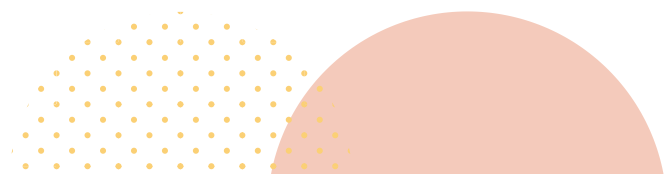
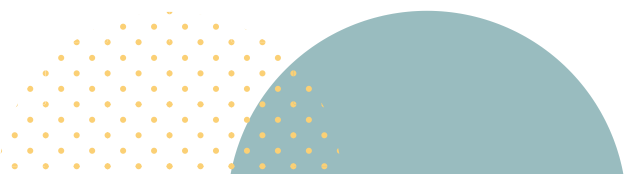
22. I avoided the excessive use of alcohol, tobacco, recreational drugs, and caffeine as a coping mechanism.

23. I relinquished avoidance and learned to face my fears by engaging in life. I participated in activities that had meaning and kept me occupied, such as work, hobbies, crafts, singing or dancing.

24. I allowed myself to pursue and feel positive emotions, such as compassion toward myself and others, expressions of gratitude, and emotions of love, joy, awe, and hopefulness.

25. I recognized and labeled my feelings, viewing them as a “message” rather than something to avoid. I accepted and dealt with these emotions, understanding that the less I fought them, the more I was able to handle them.

26. I regulated my strong negative emotions using slow smooth breathing, coping self statements, prayer, or other mood-regulating techniques.



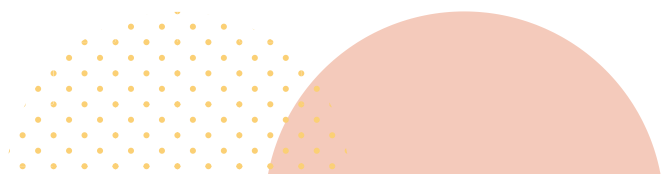
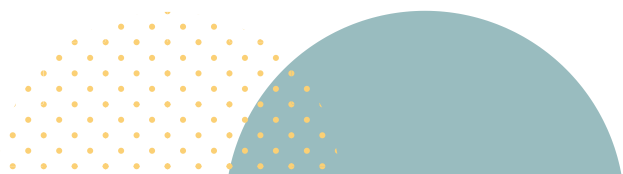
TOOK CARE OF MYSELF EMOTIONALLY AND PHYSICALLY

27. I allowed myself time to cry at times and gave words to my emotional pain. I distinguished feelings of grief from other feelings such as fear, uncertainty, guilt, shame, and anger.

28. I expressed difficult feelings through writing and talking to supportive others. I used journaling, reflective writing, letter or poetry writing, or other expressive arts of scrapbooking, dance or music.

29. I engaged in gratitude activities, such as telling others how much I appreciate their love and support, reminding myself of the things that I am thankful for, and being grateful that I knew the deceased.

30. I established a safe and comforting space for myself, either physically or through imagery.



STAYED CONNECTED TO THE DECEASED AND CREATED A NEW RELATIONSHIP, WHILE RECOGNIZING THE REALITY OF THE LOSS

31. I examined the feelings and thoughts that kept me from forming an enduring connection with the deceased, such as the fear of what others would think of me, guilt, shame, humiliation, disgust, or thoughts of anger, revenge or being preoccupied with my grief.

32. I participated in practices, such as visiting the grave or memorial site, celebrating special occasions, prayer and candlelight vigils, public memorials, or commemorative services.

33. I commemorated the deceased's life with words, pictures, things, or created a small place of honor for the deceased, which I could visit any time I chose.

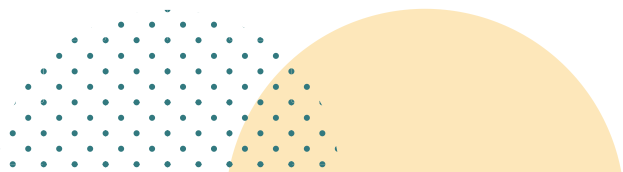
34. I thought about what I received from the deceased and the legacy and mission to be fulfilled, became involved in a cause or social action that was important to the deceased or myself.

35. I created a legacy such as planted a tree, started a scholarship or charity in the deceased's name, started an internet blog, or launched new family or community practices.

36. I allowed myself to talk to the deceased and allowed myself to listen. I wrote a letter to my loved one and asked for advice.

37. I asked for forgiveness, shared joys and sorrows, and constructed a farewell message.

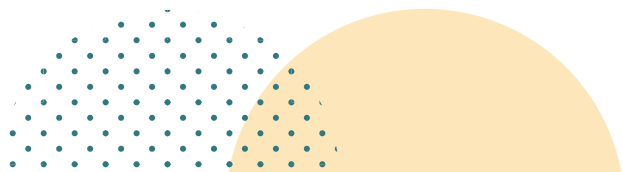
38. I accepted that sadness was normal and learned how to be with my grief. I learned how to contain my grief to a time and place of my choosing. However, I understood that intense upsurges of grief may arise unexpectedly and without warning, and I developed coping strategies to handle such events.



STAYED CONNECTED TO THE DECEASED AND CREATED A NEW RELATIONSHIP, WHILE RECOGNIZING THE REALITY OF THE LOSS

39. I used imagery techniques, shared stories and photos of my loved one, or purposefully used reminders such as music or special routines to recall positive memories. I cherished and hung onto specific, meaningful possessions (objects, pets, etc.). I actively reminisced, holding onto our relationship in my heart and mind.

40. I reached out to help and support others who are grieving for their loved ones. Helping others is a way to reengage in life and combat loneliness and tendencies to withdraw and avoid social contacts.



CREATED SAFETY AND FOSTERED SELF- EMPOWERMENT

41. I examined the thoughts that fuel my fears, avoidance, and the belief that I cannot or should not feel happy and that things would never get better.

42. I took a breather and gave myself permission to rest knowing that grieving takes time and patience, with no quick fixes.

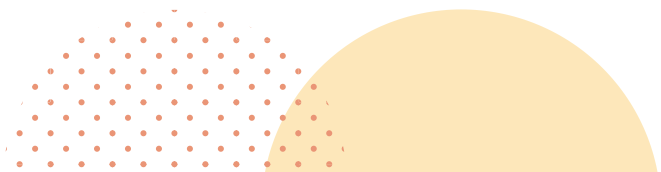
43. I identified memories that trigger or overwhelm me and disengaged and/or established boundaries by limiting people, places, or things that cause me stress or overwhelm me so that I could address them one by one, in my own time. I learned to say “no” to unreasonable requests.

44. I identified important activities, places, or things that I was avoiding due to fear of my grief reactions. I slowly reintroduced them or allowed myself to choose those I never wanted to encounter again.

45. I began to think of myself as a “survivor,” if not a “thriver” of my own story, rather than as a “victim.” I reminded myself of my strengths and of all the hard times that I have gotten through in the past.

46. I wrote out reminders of how to cope and put them on my fridge, cell phone, or computer. I looked at them when I was struggling and reminded myself of ways to be resilient.

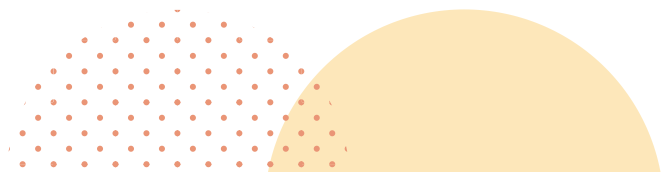
47. I created a plan about how to cope with difficult times. I learned to anticipate and recognize potential “hot spots” of when things are most difficult. I rated each day on a 1 to 10 point scale on how well I was doing. I asked myself what I can do to make things better and increase my rating. I worked on increasing the number of good days compared to the number of bad days.



CREATED SAFETY AND FOSTERED SELF- EMPOWERMENT

48. I avoided thinking “This is just how it is,” realizing that I have choices no matter how hard life is. I came to recognize that emotional pain can be a way to stay connected with my loved one.

49. When I was overwhelmed by negative memories of the past, I avoided “time-sliding” into the past. a) I “grounded” myself to the present by refocusing my attention on the environment around me, b) I changed my self-talk by telling myself “I am safe and that this will pass,” c) I controlled my bodily reactions by slowing down my breathing, and d) I oriented to people’s faces, voices or touch or called for help from a friend.



MOVED TOWARDS A FUTURE OUTLOOK AND STRONGER SENSE OF SELF

50. I examined the thoughts and feelings that kept me from moving forward, such as “I am dishonoring the deceased by getting better,” or “I am leaving him/her behind,” or “Feeling happier means that he/she is no longer important to me,” or that “My love for him/her is fading.”

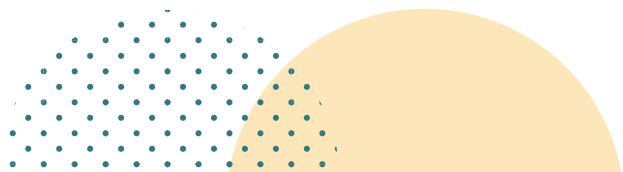
51. I regained my sense of hope for the future. I worked to reestablish a sense of purpose, with meaningful short-, mid-, and long-term goals. I am creating a life worth living, taking control of my future.

52. I worked on regaining my sense of self-identity, knowing that my life had changed, but that I am still me. I focus on what is most important. I developed new goals and action plans, consistent with what I value.

53. I created purpose by keeping the memory of the deceased alive in others. I kept others aware of the circumstances of the death, so that some good could come from the loss. I transformed my grief and emotional pain into meaning-making activities that created something “good and helpful,” for example Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention.

54. I use my faith-based and religious and spiritual beliefs to comfort me and move on. People hold different beliefs, such as “My loved one can continue to influence the lives of others in the world,” or “My loved one is no longer suffering and is in a safe place,” or “We will be reunited in the future.”

55. I examined the reasons why some of the activities that have been helpful to others in the grief process were not helpful for me, and what I can do to help myself further in the journey through grief.



OTHER COPING ACTIVITIES OR STRATEGIES I HAVE USED TO COPE WITH MY LOSS