

Dr. Lori Rappaport
12625 High Bluff Drive #201 * San Diego, CA 92130
Phone (858) 481-2188 Fax (858) 400-5204
www.lorirappaportphd.com

LIVING WITH GRIEF

As much as we wish we could run away from grief, no matter what we do, we cannot escape it. The best we can possibly expect is to distract ourselves for short periods of time, almost to fool ourselves, or “forget” the harsh reality of our loss. But it is important to recognize that grief is a process. We don’t “get over” or move “past” losing a loved one. In order to continue to move forward, we must recognize that there is no getting around grief, but rather we must go through it. Welcoming and surrendering ourselves to grief allows us to continually move through it and to come across the other side where we may find some peace and hope.

- ◆ Reserve judgment so you may allow all your feelings to come up. When we judge our feelings, we often classify them as good or bad, and this can interfere with the process of grief. When we are grieving, we need to allow ourselves to feel our feelings, without censorship, for only then can we fully understand the depth of our loss.
- ◆ Have patience for yourself. There is no replacement for time. Change is never easy, especially when it requires us to adjust to a new reality, a “new normal.” Grief requires adjustment and that is a long process that unfolds over time. There is no magic bullet to hasten this, and no substitute for it. Settle in and pace yourself for a year of firsts: first birthday, first Christmas, first holiday and first anniversary of the loss.
- ◆ Find comfort in the familiar. Surround yourself with familiar faces and routines. When we experience a drastic change, we feel vulnerable and the future seems uncertain. Try not to make major decisions during this time. Routine can be comforting, even though at times the absence of a loved one can make it more painful.
- ◆ Learn how to tolerate painful feelings. Grieving is difficult work. Just because you are feeling pain does not mean you are not coping or “handling” it. Try to avoid using substances to ease the pain, or engaging in unhealthy behaviors. Try to identify your coping skills when stressed. If you tend to isolate yourself, try calling a friend; if you tend to eat, try to exercise.
- ◆ Recognize that grief is an individual process. Don’t compare yourself to others. We all experience loss differently, and we heal in different ways and follow different timelines. Allow yourself the space to follow your own path without judgment.
- ◆ Allow yourself to experience joy. Sometimes when we are grieving we don’t allow ourselves to have fun or experience joy. We sometimes equate that to not caring about our loved one or we fear we might forget them. We might even tell ourselves that we are bad for wanting to have fun when our loved one cannot. But those of us who are grieving know that we are capable of experiencing more than one emotion at a time. We can have fun and experience grief at the same time.
- ◆ Grief is not about forgetting the past but rather about finding a way to carry the spirit and memories of our loved one with us as we move forward. It is about remembering while attaching to something new; new hopes and new dreams.
- ◆ Don’t be reluctant to ask for help. If the pain becomes too difficult to bear for too long, or you do not feel like you are adjusting very well, don’t be afraid to seek professional help. While friends and family mean well, sometimes they are ill equipped to offer the support you may need.