FINDING BALANCE IN GRIEF

When someone you love dies, most people expect to experience an emotional reaction. However, a loss can affect you in any of the dimensions shown here in the diagram. Experiencing a reaction in any of these areas can leave you feeling imbalanced. It is important to find ways of healing in each area to restore balance to yourself.

Adjusting to grief is a difficult process. In the following pages, you will find examples of how some people experienced and coped with grief in each dimension. Remember, there is no “right” way to cope with grief; you have to find what works for you. Listed below are those who contributed their thoughts. You can find their icons to help identify who shared each thought.

**Cathy** lost her husband, Bill, to thyroid cancer. They loved traveling together. They each accomplished their goal of visiting all seven continents.

**Betty** lost her sister, Mary, to colon cancer. She finds comfort in going outside and looking at the stars at night.

**Sue** lost her father, “Opa,” to ALS and lost her mother, “Oma,” several months later after battling COPD and dementia for years. Sue imagines her parents dancing together in heaven.

**Dorothy** lost her husband, Roy, to COPD. Roy was an architect and designed the interior of their home.

**Sharon** lost her husband, Ron, to congestive heart failure. She has found strength in volunteering with a grief support group.

**Christina** lost her husband, Chris, to melanoma. They had three small children. She remarried and has a child with her new husband. As a blended family, they have found ways to honor Chris.

**Gene** lost his wife, Jeanne, to lung cancer. They enjoyed playing music together and singing in the church choir.

**Pat** lost her daughter, Loretta, to abdominal cancer. Her faith has brought her much comfort.

**Lauren** lost her mom, Sally, to lung cancer. The dragonfly has become an important symbol that represents a connection to her mother.

**Cynthia** and **Cliff** lost three children of their blended family, Duane, Tawana, and Steven, due to tragedy and illness.

Adapted from “Loss in the Four Dimensions” by Sr. Teresa McIntyre.
MENTAL: Grief can affect your ability to think clearly. You may forget things or get lost driving in areas you have known for years. You may not be able to concentrate or sort out information. Some ideas to help you cope include:

- Make a to-do list if you find yourself easily forgetting things.
- Take tasks one step at a time.
- Keep a small notebook with you to write things down whenever you remember them.

I felt like I was in a fog... I couldn’t focus on things, I couldn’t remember anything. When people would tell me things I was like okay, alright and I had to repeat it.

I had to go back to work and give back instead of focusing on my issues.

The biggest thing that has helped me is accepting that my life has changed and will never be the same and realizing that these changes, although hard sometimes, are necessary and required.

I went back to volunteering.

Jeanne and I used to play music together for enjoyment. I wanted to keep that music going so I picked up her Irish penny whistle and began to teach myself to play in her memory.

RELATIONAL: Changes in your relationships are a common experience in grief. Sometimes people distance themselves and other times new relationships form. Here are some ideas on how to reach out in a healthy way:

- Join an activity club or try a new hobby to form new relationships.
- Ask friends or family members to do a project with you. Create a scrapbook or a memory garden in honor of your loved one.

The first year, I went over to my daughter’s every Sunday for dinner.

I see so much of my daughter in her kids. Some days that helps me.

There is nothing anyone can say or do to fix it, but just being there is all I need and knowing you are there and supportive.

What helps me is knowing that I’ve got other people that depend on me.

I learned to reach out and accept help from wherever it could come.

I didn’t do well with others for awhile. I needed time by myself until I got it together.

With Cliff, we respect each other’s alone time. If one of us is going through something, we have learned how to allow that person to have their space.
PHYSICAL: Sometimes grief can come out in physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches, tight muscles and difficulty sleeping. Here are some ways you can take care of yourself physically:

- Drink water and eat healthy foods to nourish your body.
- Ask for a hug.
- Take deep breaths.
- Consult your doctor.

I try not to hold onto the grief, and then I do something about it. If I hold on to it, that is when I get sick with stomach problems.

I would get so anxious I had to walk.

I saved a pair of gloves so I can put my hands in there, and even though they’re too big, I know his hands were in them.

I have utilized healing touch which helps my balance and overall welfare.

The act of getting out and doing things can help.

EMOTIONAL: Some of the many emotions of grief are loneliness, guilt, anger, sadness and shock. It is important to honor your emotions. Below are some healthy ways to sort out and express your emotions:

- Join a support group.
- Write in a journal or write a letter to your loved one.

The counseling has been a godsend. I don’t think I would have survived without it.

My most challenging emotion was anger because I didn’t want to be angry with Chris, or God. I tried to redirect the anger and focus on my kids.

I would get alone and cry by myself.

I keep trying to find things that will help me go forward. You have to help yourself. You can stay in a dark place or you can move on.

I voice what I’m feeling. I try not to hold onto it cause I get in my head and create stuff and make it worse than what it really is.

SPIRITUAL: The spiritual part of you includes the fire within you or your inner passion. For some people this involves a specific faith tradition. It is important to heal in this area as well. Some ideas include:

- Attend your church, if you have one, or ask to meet with a spiritual leader.
- Pray or meditate.
- Find activities that bring meaning and purpose to your life.

Since he has been gone, I like to talk to Roy and tell him how things are going.

My mom knew that I liked dragonflies, and the very first card that came in the mail after she died had a dragonfly on it. That gave me such a sense of joy and peace.

There was always a part of me that questioned why.

If I hadn’t held on to my spirituality, I would have been in trouble. That’s all I had going for me.

I see my mother in God’s beauty such as a beautiful blue sky or leaves rustling in the wind. Those are things that speak of this infinite energy that we are all part of, and it gives me comfort.

I started going to temple more. I think it was time to let everything else go and live in the moment.

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SUPPORT THAT SURROUNDS

BJC Hospice offers the following programs at no cost to the community:

- **Labyrinth** — A one-day grief retreat held annually in June for teens ages 13-18 who have experienced the death of a family member or friend.

- **Support Groups** — Call for more information about various grief support groups.

- **Stepping Stones Camp** — A weekend camp held annually in August for children ages 6-12 who have experienced the death of a family member or friend.

- **Weavings** — A weekend retreat held annually in the fall for mothers who have experienced the death of a child.

- **Wings on Wheels (W.O.W.)** — A mobile expressive and music therapy program to support individuals, families, and groups impacted by illness and loss.

- **Lumina** — A program to help people share their life stories and create legacy projects for loved ones.

For more information, please call 314-953-1676 or email griefsupport@bjc.org.