

Coping with Loneliness

Loneliness is a natural part of grief and it is one of the more trying aspects of accepting a loss. When a loved one dies, a hole is left that no one and nothing else can fill. It is as if no one else can know or understand. The intense and mixed feelings of grief can lead to separation and isolation from others. It is that uncomfortable feeling of being lonely in a crowd, being in the middle of a party or a family reunion or on a busy street, feeling invisible, unknown, and in pain.

Anyone who has lost a loved one knows that familiar ache of missing those who are gone, the loneliness and longing for their presence, their companionship, their voice, their smell, and just who they were.

There is also a sense of loneliness that comes from being in the world bereft. Those who are grieving may feel everything is out of sync, in contrast, the rest of the world looks orderly. People seem to be going along in their everyday easy way, as if nothing is wrong. To those who have lost someone dear, everything is wrong. The dissimilarity between them and those around them feels all the more lonely.

Another trying aspect of loneliness, which is often more difficult to talk about, is the sense of having been abandoned by the one who died, regardless of the actual circumstances. Imaginations can play with the idea that “if he really loved me, he would not have died.” Grievors may feel as if they have been left, deserted, and alone, even if it isn’t true. They may ask themselves privately, “How could he do this to me?”

Feelings of abandonment are among the most agonizing feelings to endure and conquer. The secret here is to remember the reality that death is something no one can control. Loved ones didn’t die intentionally to hurt us; they didn’t mean for us to feel abandoned.

Remember, too, **that you do not have to feel like a victim of your loneliness**. You can break through your loneliness in a moment by making one telephone call, speaking one word to another person. Share your feelings with someone you trust, let someone else into your private world. The people around you—family, friends, colleagues, caring professionals, are all part of your support system, if you let them.

Developed from Journeys with Grief: A Collection of Articles about Love, Life and Loss, edited by Kenneth J. Doka, Ph.D., MDiv., copyright Hospice Foundation of America, 2012.