

SURVIVAL STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH LOSS

What tends to happen to people when they are experiencing a recent loss in their life is that they are swamped by support, care and concern for about 6 weeks after the actual event. Casseroles, cakes and other goodies are dropped in as people struggle with finding ways to support... and then after about 6 weeks it seems we decide that it's time that you start to move on and get on with life. Then life can become very different.

If you are dealing with a recent loss you may only just be starting to come to grips with what actually happened some 3 to 6 months after the event. Here are some guidelines to help you survive this period of grieving.

- **Everyone grieves differently.** Whilst your friends and family care for you greatly, they may not be able to understand why you're still crying. Some people believe that until you've cried you haven't dealt with things... so if you haven't cried then everyone will be encouraging you to have a good cry... and it may be the last thing you really feel like doing. Either way, you might feel that you aren't managing this situation correctly. So allow yourself to feel however you feel or not feel and know that that is absolutely ok and very normal.
- **Let go of thinking too far into the future** and try and stay in a day to day mode. When you catch yourself worrying about finances, property or what is going to happen now.... take a deep breath and remind yourself that all you have is today. Focus on what has to happen today. Sometimes making a list can also take the pressure off knowing what to do next.
- **Only focus your attention on things that you have direct control over.** Let go of worrying about all the things that you really have no impact on. If you have no control over a certain event happening in your life, worrying about it is not going to change the outcome.
- **Understand that you will feel like you're on a roller coaster-** some days you will feel like your old self and other days you will be plunged into a space that may not feel that great. In those times, seek out good friends, practice the art of journaling how it is all going- you might even want to connect with a counsellor and talk more about what is happening for you.
- **It's ok to not want to do anything whilst you're grieving.** Many people feel they need to go on anti-depressants or just "get on with life" at this time because life just becomes too hard. Whilst medication can be a valuable short term support, also understand that you're processing in your own way what has happened. That is going to involve a mix of thoughts and feelings- some so intense that you may not have the confidence to feel that you are going to survive. This is the time to seek support- see your GP and go and see a counsellor to talk.
- **Give yourself time-** there is no right timeframe for dealing with grief. Over a period of time the actual event may become less intense... or you may always hold strong feelings over what has happened. Sometimes when you feel that you are now in a better space, a song, a smell, an anniversary or some small thing might trigger some intense feelings and thoughts. This is the time to be very gentle on yourself. Speaking to someone to help you make sense of all that has happened can be very comforting and releasing.
- **As hard as it may be try and take care of yourself by eating well and getting enough rest.** Don't worry if you can't sleep like you did before. Just relaxing on your bed- listening to your favourite music or a relaxation tape will give your body the rest it needs. If you notice that you might be drinking a little more than usual or eating a little too much, even when you're not hungry or any new form of behaviour it may be time to look at new ways of dealing with the stress. Speaking to trusted friends or a counsellor can help you through this.
- **Asking for support shows great self awareness and strength-** it is not a weakness. If you feel like you have failed because you don't know what to do next, then that may

be the very space you stay locked into. Life is going to deal up new experiences that we have never had to deal with before. Why do we beat ourselves up for thinking we should know the answer? Other people will share with you what you need to do- go and join a club, start yoga, take a holiday. These are all useful strategies and most probably worked well for them...they may not necessarily be what you need however. When you get to the point of not knowing what to do next- that is not failure, it's just now knowing what to do next. It is a sign that a change may be imminent and through talking and time the next step will show up when you least expect it.

So for some of you reading this the loss may still feel very raw. For some of you reading this, it may have re-invigorated old feelings or thoughts around events that you felt had long passed. Either way, give yourself a break.. and be gentle on yourself. And if you're not sure what that means or how to do it, then contact a counsellor and have a talk.

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About Shirley:

Shirley Hicks publishes her monthly Healthy Matters newsletter for clients and people interested in creating a happier , healthier lifestyle. Shirley specializes in grief and loss counselling. If you want more happiness and health in your life, then sign up for her Healthy Matters E-zine. If you liked this article then why not download Shirley's FREE e-book, *16 EASY STEPS TO RENEW YOUR ENERGY* FREE for you today. www.shirleyhicks.com.au