



The Twelve Freedoms of Grief

Freedom #1: You have the freedom to realize your grief is unique. Others may grieve in different ways than you because your experience will be influenced by a variety of factors, including the relationship you had with the person who died, the circumstances of the death (whether it was sudden or expected), and your cultural and religious background. It is important not to compare oneself with others who are grieving, and to consider the “one day at a time” approach to allow yourself to proceed at your own pace.

Freedom #2: You have the freedom to talk about your grief. By expressing grief openly, healing occurs and you are likely to feel better. Ignoring it will not make your grief go away. It is important to seek out caring friends and relatives who will listen without judging.

Freedom #3: You have the freedom to expect to feel a multitude of emotions. Your head, heart and spirit will be affected when you are experiencing loss. As a result, you may experience feelings of confusion, disorganization, fear, guilt, relief or other emotions. Sometimes they may come simultaneously or follow each other within a short period of time. It is important to know that these emotions are a normal response to the death of a loved one even though you may be feeling overwhelmed at the time.

Freedom #4: You have the freedom to allow for numbness. Part of the grief experience when a loved one dies includes feeling numb and disoriented. It allows your emotions to “catch up” with what you know intellectually and allows you to be insulated from the reality of the death until you can tolerate what you don’t want to believe.

Freedom #5: You have the freedom to be tolerant of physical and emotional limits. You may feel very tired as a result of your feelings of loss and sadness. Your low energy level may impair your ability to think clearly and to make decisions. It is important to nurture yourself by getting daily rest, eating balanced meals, keeping as much to your regular routine, and lowering your expectations of daily “things to do” lists.

Freedom #6: You have the freedom to experience grief attacks or memory embraces. You may experience “surges of grief” or flashbacks (“memory embraces”), that can be frightening and leave you feeling overwhelmed. These feelings are normal. Try to find someone who understands how you’re feeling and is willing to listen.

Freedom #7: You have the freedom to develop a support system. Although reaching out to others and accepting their help may be difficult, finding people who will provide the understanding you need and who will let you be yourself may be the best action you can take on your behalf.



Freedom #8: You have the freedom to make use of an event or ceremony. The funeral ritual or celebration of life serves the dual purpose of acknowledging the death of a loved one and allowing you to express grief. It also provides you with the support of caring people who are also grieving.

Freedom #9: You have the freedom to embrace your spirituality. Express your faith in whatever ways that seem appropriate to you. Try to have people around you who support your religious beliefs. You may feel hurt and abandoned and may feel angry with God because of the death of someone you loved, but it is important to realize that this feeling is a normal part of grief. Try to find someone who won't be judgmental about your feelings and who will allow you to explore your thoughts and feelings.

Freedom #10: You have the freedom to allow a search for meaning. You may find yourself asking, "Why did he or she have to die, and why now?" This search for meaning is often another normal part of the healing process. Some questions have answers. Some do not. Actually, healing occurs in the opportunity to pose the questions, not necessarily in answering them. Find a supportive friend who will listen responsively as you search for meaning.

Freedom #11: You have the freedom to cherish moments. Treasure your memories of your loved one who has died. Share them with your family and friends. Recognize that your memories may make you laugh or cry. In either case, they are a lasting part of the relationship that you had with a very special person in your life.

Freedom #12: You have the freedom to move through your grief and heal. The facility to love requires the necessity to grieve when someone you love dies. You cannot heal unless you openly express your grief. Denying your grief will only make it become more confusing and overwhelming. Embrace your grief and heal. Reconciling grief will not happen quickly. Remember grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself. Never forget that the death of someone you love changes our life forever. It's not that you will never be happy again; it's simply that you will never be exactly the same as you were before the death.

By Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD. From a publication of the Widowed Person's Service—AARP. Reprinted from TCF, Sacramento Valley Chapter, November 1996.
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