



NTSAD

NTSAD FAMILY CONNECTIONS

For Newly Bereaved Families | Month Four

Evaluating Your Coping Strategies

FROM LIVING WITH LOSS, SAN DIEGO HOSPICE, ISSUE 2

Although grief is a painful experience, there are ways of coping that are more helpful than others. Take a look at the strategies you are using. Do they seem to be working? Are there some strategies you should be avoiding?

Strategies That Promote Healing

Crying
Talking and Sharing
Meditation and Prayer
Attending Support Groups
Staying Busy But Resting
Structuring Your Time
Keeping a Journal
Using Relaxation Techniques
Affirming Spiritual Beliefs
Respecting Your Own Needs
Humor
Listening to Music
Reading
Exercising Regularly
Eating Healthy
Traveling
Pampering Yourself
Being with Friends and Family
Work

Strategies That Hinder the Healing Process

Using Alcohol and Drugs
Avoiding All Reminders of Your Loved One
Oversleeping
Overeating
Smoking
Pretending All is Fine
Overspending
Refusing to Make Necessary Changes
Focusing on Suicide
Carelessness
Overactivity
Pushing Past Limits
Isolating Yourself
Over-idealizing the Person
Neglecting Health Needs
Spoiling Relationships with Friends
Spoiling Relationships with Family Members

There are many things you can do to promote your own healing. Most of these strategies revolve around giving yourself permission to experience and express your grief at your own pace.

Find the strategies that enable the healing process to take place in you. Don't be afraid to ask for help if you are concerned about the strategies you are using to deal with your grief. Ask others for ideas. Remember, that as you move through the grief process, you may need to modify or change your strategies for coping.

"There is no right way to grieve.
There is just your way."

-Rusty Berkus

Resources:

Your Identity as a Grieving Parent

After the loss of a child, many of us struggle to find our place in the world without them. The [Courageous Parents Network](#)'s pathway for bereaved parents features several videos from bereaved parents themselves. In their own words parents share their voice on topics such as addressing [Your Identity as a Bereaved Parent](#) and how to answer the question of ['How many children do you have?'](#)

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GRIEF BY SURPRISE

BY BECKY BENSON, MISS ELLIOTT'S MOM

It's not unusual to be managing your day when a moment of grief takes you by surprise. Ever unpredictable, and often unwelcome, these moments have the power to derail our thoughts and actions, and to knock us down into a place of sorrow. Everyday questions that most people would assume to be innocuous can have a powerful impact on grieving parents who struggle with how to answer the question in a way that honors their loss, but guards against their feelings of grief. The answer is immensely personal, and there is no wrong way to answer this question.

Recently, another mother of loss recounted to me that she was in the dental chair for a routine cleaning when suddenly the hygienist asked her how many children she had. Unexpected and encumbered by the dental tools in her mouth she was unable to explain. For her, it wasn't as easy as holding up a few fingers in response. She began crying in the dental chair, much to the surprise of both herself, and the hygienist alike. She wanted to explain that she was a bereaved mother, but couldn't in that moment. The flood of emotions she felt bubbled over and the hygienist stopped what she was doing to ask if she had inadvertently hurt her with a dental instrument.

This mom then explained that she has three children in total, but one had died from Tay-Sachs disease. The hygienist was terribly apologetic. She had done nothing wrong, but it had caused an uncomfortable situation for both. As we mentioned, in those moments we can struggle with how to answer in a way that feels appropriate to us, honors our loved one, and even guards against our overwhelming feelings of grief.

Some parents of loss have chosen to answer this way:

"I used to get flustered by this question: now I just answer honestly. I have three children, two in heaven and one with me. If someone asks for further explanation, I talk about the boys and the disease they had. If not, I don't go into it."

"Honestly, if it's with a stranger that I'll never interact with again, I just say two. I don't always want to prompt the conversation that follows the Tay-Sachs revelation."

"I always explain that I have two children, one who has passed, and one who is still living. It's what makes me comfortable. I feel that I have to acknowledge [my daughter] no matter what, and I always will. I don't mind if it makes someone else uncomfortable for a moment, it's the reality of our lives and I'm always happy to speak her name."

While every parent is different, it's important that your answer be one that you feel comfortable giving.

"A butterfly lights beside us like a sunbeam. And for a brief moment its glory and beauty belong to our world. But then it flies on again, and though we wish it could have stayed, we feel so lucky to have seen it."