



Handbook for Grievors

The ultimate resource and reference Handbook for Grievors.
Helping you to understand your grief and to heal in a healthy way.

By Mary Francis



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Handbook for Grievers – Sample from Section # 1



Make it Your Home

Your home was shared with your spouse and now you may not feel at home in your own house. Do you dread facing your empty house when you come home?

Slowly and carefully you may want to make some small changes, but only when it feels right to you. Start with one room by looking around it and deciding on what you want to keep, what is comfortable for you and what needs to go.

It could be as simple as moving a plant into an empty corner or getting a new cover for your bed. The moment you make one simple change, you are starting to make the home yours.

Be willing to experiment and remember that even though your loved one does not live there anymore, their spirit remains in your memories. Move things around, take some away and add something new.

Slowly, you can breathe some freshness into your home and it will be more welcoming when you walk into it.

What do you do with all the things you have accumulated over the years? I found out, much to my amazement, that the children didn't want them either.

Having a lot of things stuffed in boxes in the garage and closets created negative energy. Eliminating the clutter freed me of always thinking about it and having it done made me feel better.

If it's your loved ones clothes and personal possessions, don't do anything with them till some time has passed and you are ready. But don't hold on to all their things for years and years. There are some things that should be kept for memories but old tools, big boy toys, clothes and collectables should go unless you use them yourself.

It may take energy you don't feel like you have, but just getting up and doing this as a project will make you feel like you are accomplishing something. That feeling of accomplishment will help you move on to the next project and give you something positive to plan for. Life isn't about "things" – "things" don't come to your funeral.



Self-Acceptance

One of the most important life skills is to not merely accept our situation in life, but to embrace it - to live through it and yet not let it take your spirit away. Boy, is that a mouthful because there is no way a griever is going to embrace being a griever. Perhaps instead of saying “embrace” a better word would be to “accept”.

I know that there is no moving forward through your grief until you have self-acceptance. Being a griever is a name for this stage of your life, but it does not define who you are as a person. Part of your grief journey is also a journey in finding out who you are when you are no longer part of a couple.

When your loved one dies, to say that your life will change is the greatest of all understatements. Your life will be torn apart; mentally, physically, financially and spiritually.

Your life goes from secure to chaos and is usually characterized by its emptiness and profound sadness. Money will be an important factor as lack of funds will change your future. You have to make decisions about downsizing, going back to work, investments plus many more decisions at a time when you are unbalanced and stressed.

Immediately after their death, don't let anyone rush you into making quick decisions. Your mind isn't thinking clearly for big decisions and those decisions could create problems for you down the road. You may even want to postpone any major decisions, such as selling the family home, for the first year as your decisions may be driven by emotions and not clear thought.

There will be all kinds of well-meaning people with advice on what you should or shouldn't do. They mean to help, so smile and listen but understand that they may not know your financial situation. Organize and prioritize by making a daily list of things to do so you don't get overwhelmed.

You are responsible for yourself and your young children, so dig in and learn as much as possible before you pass your life over to someone else or before making decisions without careful planning. You may be talked down to or not taken seriously, but stand your ground and you will grow as a person who has taken charge of their life.

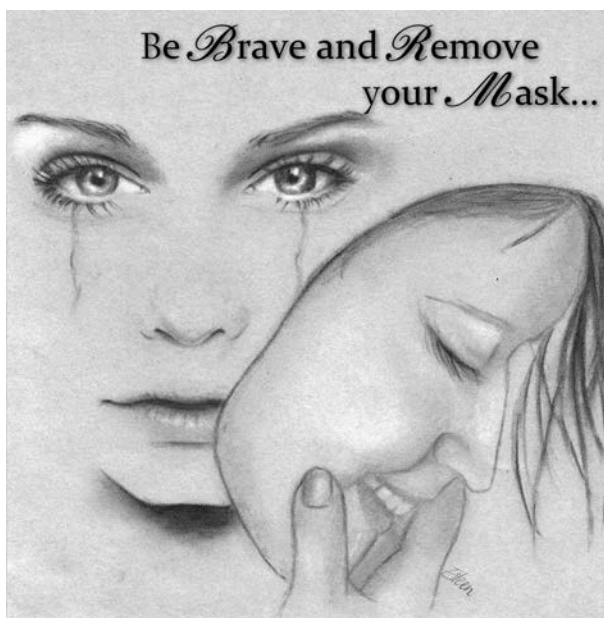
This is your life – prepare yourself intellectually and emotionally to take charge of your future. Don't assume others have your back, don't take for granted that it will all work out on its own and most importantly don't depend on others without first taking the time to check things out.



Handbook for Grievors – Sample from Section # 2



Have You Been Hiding Behind a Mask?



A mask is an image that you project so that others believe that is who you are. But it stops others from really knowing how you're feeling and may even keep you from knowing yourself.

You may not want to take off your mask because you don't want others to see the sadness underneath. But when you take that leap of faith you will often experience more closeness with friends and family.

It can be exhausting always wearing that happy face mask.

Let people know what you are really feeling instead of always having to appear strong.

When your mask gets too heavy, have faith in yourself and throw it away. The real you will be out in the open and then you can start rebuilding your life.



I want to share some insights I have learned concerning bereavement:



- Grieving people are best helped by those that have also lost a loved one.
- The process of grieving begins the day that your loved one is diagnosed with a life threatening disease and does not end until one's own death.
- Grieving people need an emotionally safe place where they can talk without fear, interruption or judgment.
- Grief is an extremely personal journey and is unique to each person.
- Grief is NOT tied to a specific time frame.
- People who are grieving do not always follow expected notions of behavior.
- Grieving people need the understanding of friends to help them make changes.
- I believe we must respect all forms of loss and take into account the differences in cultural and religious traditions. Widows should be allowed to honor their loved ones in their own personal way.



Handbook for Grievers – Sample from Section # 3



When Are We Ready to Date?

The fear of loving and losing another partner may prevent some from loving again. It can take time to risk being hurt and emotionally tied to another person again. Take your time with a new relationship because dating too soon (and only you can judge that) may be nothing more than you trying to fill that emptiness in your heart.

First learn to love yourself and then you will be able to move on to a healthy new relationship, but only if and when you are ready. You will still argue and still have moments of total frustration. Whether it's a friend or another partner, relationships do require effort. So be prepared before you get back into the dating game.

It's hard to trust and get into another relationship where you may end up going through more emotional pain. Maybe the relationship will be a second love, but then they get sick and you're a widow again. Or maybe the relationship will not work out and your trust is broken. It takes time to become emotionally open to understanding that trust begins with your relationship with yourself and then flows out to others.

The typical widow wonders, "Can I find love again?" When you lose your spouse you often re-examine what love means to you. You may feel unlovable and even be afraid that you will never be in love again. This fear can be overwhelming when you really want to be in a relationship again.

Here it is - I'm going to talk about sex, that forbidden topic that no one wants to bring up. What do you think of when the word sex is mentioned? Most of us tend to be interested, but scared and we react emotionally. But the truth is that sex is over emphasized and glamorized by society as a whole.

The funny thing is that married couples think single people get all the action and are free to get all they want, anytime, anyplace – and single people think that married couples are the ones that are having all the fun. In reality, a widow often finds the hassle of sexuality the most trying in starting up another relationship.

Having a loving husband made having a sexual life easy and comfortable and just because our husbands are gone doesn't mean our sexual needs go away. This may surprise you if it comes soon after your spouse's death, but it is normal and you aren't being disrespectful to your spouse by feeling this way.



Enjoying the Single Life

An important element in the rebuilding of your life is the process of learning to love yourself first. As you love yourself you will attract others to you. If you don't love yourself, how can you expect anybody else to love you? Have faith in yourself because you are loveable just as you are – this I know.

If the center of your life is your spouse and he dies, the center is suddenly removed and that is what makes your grieving so painful. We end up sometimes feeling unloved and spend time looking for another love immediately to heal our wounds.

Many confuse sex and love, so in the beginning it is wiser to go easy on love relationships. Invest in friendships first until you learn to love yourself. Falling in love to overcome loneliness is not actually love.

Mature love is loving another person for who he is and not for what he can do for you. We need to be better at receiving compliments, appreciation and encouragement from men.

You can't fully receive love from someone new when you're hiding part of yourself. Most of us have repressed the pain and hurt of our past.

Love comes when you have allowed yourself to grow with the help of another. When both of you know how to give and receive you will have received "the ultimate lifetime achievement reward for love."

I've talked to many widows who have shut themselves off from having another relationship because of the pain of their loss. Their fear of being hurt again is so great they refuse to open their hearts to someone new.

It's difficult to break down that wall of protection but if we don't expose our heart to love, we end up denying our need to be cherished for who we really are.

This period of change doesn't make for a good foundation, so don't move too quickly. Who are you? Take time to write out everything you know about yourself – the good, bad and ugly.

Know yourself, accept what you can't change. Examples: Family, upbringing, height, etc. and improve yourself where and when you can.



Handbook for Grievers – Sample from Section # 4



After a Few Years – What Then?

When dealing with a death of a loved one you focus exclusively on the loss. You cannot even imagine that other events may occur in the wake of or even because of that loss. When you think of the future, there is an emptiness and nothing matters.

In the end, if you are down on yourself you may pull away from other people, becoming isolated and lonely. A breakdown of self-esteem is a central characteristic of loneliness and depression.

We have only a limited time on this earth and we need to face the reality that our life goes on after the death of our loved one. When we do, that constant awareness of the limit of our time to live and love should give us the courage to care about others without losing our own health; physically and mentally.

The first few years of grieving can be pure hell and yet they can contain the beginnings of new joys. These joys start out slowly and require nourishment to grow. When you're in the midst of your loss, you may not notice these gleams of light.

When you lose someone you love you go on a journey of grief. At first you're unbalanced and stumble along. You may even fall as the path is uneven, dark and unknown to you.

As time passes you will get more balanced with friends and family willing to help you. The path will become more even and you will be able to look back to where you started and see how far you have come.

Then one day you will realize that you haven't fallen in a while and that you can see into the distance. You realize that your grief journey has changed and you are now on the path of healing.

Later, much later, you will be able to go back and help others who are just starting their own grief journey. This may be part of your healing and will be a blessing to those who need your guidance.

You may not be paying attention to these newborn sources of happiness, but they are there and some day you will be ready to receive them.



Dreams

Now and then, a newly bereaved person will tell me about a recurring thought or dream of a loved one. The person feels possessed by these thoughts or dreams and powerless to stop them.

No one has told me that these recurring thoughts are either depressing or upsetting. It is just that the individual seems to have no control over them.

After Donnie's death, I experienced a very real dream of him and he said "It's going to be okay Mary" and that is all he said, but it was so clear and I heard it just like he was laying there beside me. I certainly had no control over the dream, but I never forgot it.

I wanted to talk about this phenomenon with my friends, however, I have learned the lesson that it is much better to let people bring up the subject rather than to just launch into my experiences.

Often, somebody will mention several times that he or she can't stop thinking about the death of the loved one. That statement usually encourages others to talk about the same subject. This has happened to me many times and usually people are visibly relieved to hear that their friends have had the same experience.

One psychologist has a simple message - *One of the worst things that can happen to you has happened. Now you can either take charge of your situation, or it will take charge of you.*

People say that a song or a type of music will bring on an overwhelming sense of loss that is devastating. Others have spoken about the difficulty of attending social gatherings alone. I can remember driving along and being so overwhelmed by a sense of loss that I had to pull off the road.

I would like to suggest that if bereaved people take time to have occasional quiet visits with their loved ones, this strategy may go a long way to helping them accept their new life's condition without forgetting the past.

There are so many happy times to think about as well as those little tiffs that married people have now and then, the crazy things we did together, the birthdays with the kids and their friends, and so on, and so on.

After the death of a loved the survivor is left with feelings that are difficult to understand and to live with. It may take them a long time to share their feelings, and sometimes all they need is a little encouragement.