



8 steps to healing: a pathway through grief

cancerFAMILYcare
provides **Strength for**
the Journey when
cancer strikes.

About Cancer Family Care

Since 1971, Cancer Family Care (CFC) has provided counseling, education, and emotional support to people affected by cancer. CFC offers four programs: The Center for Individual and Family Counseling, Treehouse Children’s Services, The Coping Connection – Education and Outreach, and Tresses Wig Program.

Cancer Family Care seeks to help children and adults cope with the effects of a cancer-related illness or loss. CFC is known throughout Southwestern Ohio and Northern Kentucky as a force of compassion and strength in the face of cancer and bereavement.

Your Pathway Through Grieving

Have you recently experienced the death of a loved one? Do you wonder when this time of mourning will end? Mental health professionals suggest that people take certain steps in mourning the loss of a loved one. Check to see how you are moving along the path.

Step 1: Acknowledging the Death

The first step is to acknowledge the death of your loved one by using difficult words like “death” and “dead,” rather than “gone to heaven” or “no longer with us.”

- Are you able to acknowledge the reality of the death of your loved one?

Step 2: Getting the Pain Out

People express grief in a variety of ways: crying, talking with someone, pounding pillows, or writing in a journal. If you keep painful feelings bottled up, they are likely to explode when you least expect them to.

- Have you found one or more ways to express your grief?

Step 3: Finding the Middle Ground

There are two common excesses in grieving: constantly thinking about one’s loss and keeping too busy to remember the loss. Both extremes can be disabling. Those who cope best seem to grieve in small doses—finding time each day to be aware of the sorrow and taking time to focus on other things. Some people find working during the day to be a treasured relief. Some people use humor to keep a balance, and others gain solace in rationalizing the person’s death. (“Dad is not suffering anymore.”)

- Are you finding your middle ground?

Step 4: Continuing a Relationship

Keeping the memory of your loved one alive is healthy. Some people do this by displaying a favorite picture of the deceased, visiting the gravesite on special occasions, or giving possessions of the loved one to relatives and friends.

- Are you keeping the memory of your loved one alive?

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Step 5: Caring for Yourself

Self-neglect is no testimonial to a loved one who has died. Stay healthy while you are mourning. Eat right, exercise, rest, and be patient with the process of grieving. Take care of practical matters such as contacting Social Security or updating your will.

- ✦ *Are you able to care for yourself since your loved one died?*

Step 6: Adjusting Successfully to Changing Relationships within the Family

When a family member dies, changes take place in the way the surviving members relate to one another. For instance, maybe you always approached your father through your mother. How do you communicate with your father now that your mother is gone? Or maybe your brother was the joker in the family. Now who will help the family lighten up when stressful events occur? Since your family will never be able to return to normal in these important ways, you will have to create a “new normal.” What roles of the deceased person will be missed the most?

- ✦ *Are you learning new ways to communicate with family members?*

Step 7: Inventing New Traditions

Not only must you deal with changed relationships, but you may also have to change some important routines and traditions that your family has come to cherish over the years. This is another way your family may have to seek a “new normal.”

- ✦ *Have you established new ways of celebrating holidays or taking vacations?*

Step 8: Learning to Accept Loss and Tragedy in Your View of the World

Losses can be so painful that they shake your basic assumptions about the world: the fairness of life, the trustworthiness of friends, or the goodness of God. It may take time before you can formulate a new belief about the world that includes such realities as tragedy or senseless suffering.

- ✦ *Have you changed mentally or spiritually since your loss?*

“The person who does not take time to mourn will not have time to mend.”

– John Donne

Signs of healing may be when you can think of the deceased with sadness but without intense pain, or when you feel prepared to reinvest in goals and live life well.

Don't rush it.

LEARN from it.

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