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# Pathways

A Newsletter to Help in Bereavement

## Signs of Recovery

**J**ust as crocuses are the first signs of spring following the bleakness and endlessness of a cold and dreary winter, there are early signs of recovery from the long and painful journey through grief.

Survivors come through the grief process forever changed by their loss, but the majority do come through! It may be as hard for you to believe that now as it is to accept on a dark and snowy December night that there will be hillsides full of blooming azaleas in spring.

Look carefully for these signs of recovery:

### ***Lessening of Pain***

One early indication of grief recovery is the lessening of the frequency, intensity and duration of emotional pain. Recurrent thoughts about the loved one who has died and chronic tearfulness following loss are common bereavement symptoms, but when you realize that you have had a few good days in a row, recovery has begun.

When good days outnumber the bad, you are well on your way toward successfully adjusting to your loss. Having a 24-hour period go by without asking the "why" question is a positive sign for some survivors. So too is beginning to see options and possibilities for a future no longer shared with the deceased.

### ***Change in Focus***

As grief softens, you will find that you are able to talk about and remember the deceased with greater pleasure. Memories that once brought only pain and tears may now bring comfort and even a smile on recalling your loved one's favorite TV show, ice cream flavor, or tendency to make puns. You may notice, too, that you talk more about the life of your loved one than about the relatively brief time period associated with the death.

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This shift in focus provides many more comforting memories than does the earlier dwelling on the details surrounding the loss. At the same time, a more balanced picture which acknowledges both the good and bad characteristics of the deceased allows us to mourn the loss of a human being -- and not a saint.

### ***Increased Enjoyment***

With movement in grief work, your genuine enjoyment of activities and people reappears. Laughter returns, uninterrupted by thoughts of guilt about living on or of pain about being left behind. Emotional energy that no longer goes directly into the early phases of grief work

can be invested in new activities or reinvested in old pastimes and relationships.

The process of "re-owning" -- taking back hobbies, vacation spots and restaurants once shared and, following the death, given up -- is an important one in grief recovery.

### ***Role of Comforter***

Finally, a real litmus test for grief recovery is the ability to encounter grief and pain in others with compassion and empathy, and without your own grief being rekindled. Are you able to help others in grief without becoming overwhelmed by your own losses? If the answer is yes, then you have done well in wringing out of your own experience the ability to offer genuine comfort to others.

Seasons come and go, but our losses remain with us. Recovery does not mean forgetting or going on as if wholly cured. It does mean that the acute pain engendered by the loss is now a bearable ache and that our commitment to go on despite significant loss in our life will bear the fruit of love and laughter once more.

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