

STRATEGIES TO HELP SURVIVE PAINFUL TIMES

Some strategies suggested here will be helpful; others may not. Try putting into practice some of the recommendations that you have not tried and find out what works for you. After a period of trial and error you will find out what helps you to survive and heal.

A. TAKING GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF

When we are overwhelmed by pain just making it through the day can be difficult. One thing that you do have control over is taking good care of yourself. We may forget about simple things that maintain our health and prevent illness; they are more important than ever now.

1. Healthy Eating Habits

- Eat healthy meals regularly
- Avoid skipping meals or overeating
- Avoid excess sugar, caffeine, alcohol
- Drink plenty of fluids

2. Exercise/Physical Fitness

- A consistent exercise/physical fitness regime can help you work out stress, deal with anger, improve sleep and physically feel better. (Consult with your doctor.)
- Join an exercise class or a sports team
- Take a brisk walk or bike ride
- Work out regularly

3. Relaxation Exercises

- These are a variety of ways to relax your body and to calm your mind.
- Taking slow, deep breaths is a simple way to calm yourself & decrease anxiety.
- Progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery & meditation tapes are available at libraries and book stores.

B. DEALING WITH OVERWHELMING FEELINGS

Feelings of sadness, anxiety, fear, anger, loneliness and guilt can overwhelm us when we least expect it, leaving us feeling helpless and uncertain what to do.

1. Talk it out with someone who will listen without judging or giving advice.
2. Make a list of all the feelings you are experiencing now.
3. Put your energy into an artistic endeavor about your loved one or your grief journey
 - paint, draw, write a poem.
4. Time outdoors with nature can be healing.
5. Music is soothing to some.
6. Get involved in an intense physical activity
 - dance, walk fast, work-out, exercise, clean, scrub.
7. Start a journal to record your grief journey or to simply release the feelings you are experiencing. (Later it will help you see your progress.)
8. When you feel sad, make time to cry. Tears are healing.
9. Learn about grief. Books on grief or stories of others grief are reassuring

C. COPING WITH INTENSE GRIEF

There may be times the pain you feel is intense. You may need to stop what you are doing and focus on caring for yourself for a little while.

1. Find a quiet place alone and do some slow, deep breathing
2. If taking it a "day at a time" seems overwhelming, just focus on getting through an hour at a time.
3. Prioritize what really needs to be done. Grieving takes a lot of energy; you may not be able to accomplish what you are accustomed to for a while.
4. Be gentle and patient with yourself. Grieving is hard work.

D. RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS THAT YOU MAY NEED PROFESSIONAL HELP

1. Feeling very sad, hopeless and depressed consistently
2. Significant change in eating and sleeping habits
3. Having hardly any energy and interest in life
4. Withdrawing from friends and family –becoming isolated
5. Any thoughts or plans for hurting yourself, seek professional help immediately.
Call a community mental health center, counselor, social worker, psychologist, hospital or the police for help.

Woodburn Emergency Services Staff is available 24 hours a day at 703-573-5679.

E.. REACHING OUT TO OTHERS

Most of us have the need to share our pain and receive support from others. This is not always easy, as some people are unable to be with people in pain and unknowingly encourage you to deny or suppress feelings. You may need to ask directly for what you need instead of expecting others will know how to help you.

1. Identify relatives, colleagues and friends who are sensitive and supportive.
2. Seek out people who are helping resources already in your community such as counselors, religious and community leaders.
3. Consider joining a support group with others who have been through a similar experience.
4. Seeing a therapist can be a real source of consistent support at this time.

F. DON'T GIVE UP HOPE

When you are overwhelmed with pain, you may feel numb or that you'll never heal or be happy again. It takes time. If you make an effort to use these strategies on your own and to reach out to others, in time you will begin to feel the pain lessen.

1. The ability to enjoy humor and laugh is helpful and relieves stress even in times of sadness and pain.
2. Remember that although you had no control over the loss you experienced, you do have control over your response to it.
3. Although people who grieve experience many of the same feelings, everyone's journey through grief is unique. This journey is your own and with some effort you will find what best helps you to survive and heal.