

The Mourner's Bill of Rights

As a bereaved person, you have certain rights that others must not take away from you. In fact, it is the very upholding of these rights that makes healing possible.

1. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXPERIENCE YOUR OWN UNIQUE GRIEF.

No one else will grieve in exactly the same way you do. Don't allow others to tell you what you should or should not be feeling.

2. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO TALK ABOUT YOUR GRIEF.

Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk as much as you want, as often as you want, about your grief.

3. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO FEEL A MULTITUDE OF EMOTIONS.

Confusion, disorientation, fear, guilt, and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey. Know that there is no such thing as a "wrong" emotion. Accept all your feelings and find listeners who will do the same.

4. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE TOLERANT OF YOUR PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL LIMITS.

Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind is telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel ready to do.

5. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXPERIENCE GRIEF "ATTACKS".

Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but is normal and natural. Find someone who understands and will let you talk it out.

6. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO MAKE USE OF RITUAL.

The funeral ritual provides you with the support of caring people. More important, it supportively sees you off on your painful but necessary grief journey. Later rituals, such as lighting a candle for the person who died, can also be healing touchstones. If others tell you that rituals such as these are silly or unnecessary, don't listen.

7. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO EMBRACE YOUR SPIRITUALITY.

If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you feel angry with God, find someone to talk with who won't be critical of your feelings of hurt and abandonment.

8. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO SEARCH FOR MEANING.

You may find yourself asking, "Why did he or she die? Why this way? Why now?" Some of your questions may have answers, but some may not. Watch out for the clichéd responses that some people may give you. Comments like, "It was God's will" or "Think of what you have to be thankful for" are not (may not be) helpful and you do not have to accept them.

9. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO TREASURE YOUR MEMORIES.

Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. You will always remember. Instead of ignoring your memories, find creative ways to embrace them.

10. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO MOVE TOWARD YOUR GRIEF AND HEAL.

Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly. Remember, grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you must forget that the death of someone loved changes your life forever.

(Alan Wolfelt, PH.D)