

WHAT NOW?

When you attend a support group, what are your expectations? Some enter the experience with hopes that all the pain will go away. Others suspect that a support group is not a magic pill, yet might help. Some have no defined expectations, just know that they needed to do something.

Early on, we learn that this is griefwork, with an emphasis on **work**. Take a measurement of where you are in the reconciliation process. This may help to focus your energies as you continue your work outside the support group.

- We learn to effectively experience and express outside ourselves the reality of the death. For many, a support group is the first opportunity to do this. For others, it is a continuation and reinforcement of what was started elsewhere. It is necessary to continue the process of outside expression of our feelings, whether that be talking regularly to others, writing in our journals, or any other form of outside expression.
- We learn to allow ourselves to embrace the pain of the loss while learning how to nurture ourselves physically, emotionally and spiritually. Over and over we heard that the only way **out is through**. When I am in a safe place, I will permit my feelings to surface and be experienced. Stifling the pain prolongs the agony. This is also a time to emphasize caring for our physical, emotional, and spiritual selves.
- We learn how to convert our relationship with the person who died from an interactive presence to one of appropriate memory. This is a process which can't be deliberately willed. We learn to just make a mental note of it as something which is in the process of happening at a subconscious level, and to allow our subconscious to do its work without interference.
- We learn how to develop a new self-identity based on a life without the person who died. Each person's journey is different, and our individual timing is unique. Each day, some experience takes place which continues to build our new self-identity. For some who had a deeply enmeshed relationship, this may be a difficult task. It isn't a sign of weakness to seek professional help.
- We begin to relate the experience of the death to a context of new meaning in our lives. For many, death provokes questions regarding the meaning of life and its transitory nature. There are no universal answers to many of these questions, however the process of seeking them often brings a meaningful answer to each of us. I will allow myself time for my own discovery of meaning. I won't permit others to rush me with their pat conclusions.
- We develop a lasting network of support to help us through the process. A group is a useful step toward learning to establish lasting support. Through our emphasis on phone calls and networking, it reinforces my ability to reach out. Sometimes it's not easy but I will keep trying because I know that continuing to reach out will help my reconciliation timetable.