



Bill of Rights for Those in Grief

Adapted from “The Grieving Person’s Bill of Rights” by Alan Wolfelt

Each person grieves in his or her own way; there is no right or wrong. Along the way, you may encounter people trying to help. This “bill of rights” is something for you to consider in determining what is and is not helpful to you.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to experience your own unique grief. No one else will grieve in exactly the same way you do. No one else can tell you what you should or should not be feeling.

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, and as often as you want, about your grief. There is no time limit on traveling the path of grief.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to feel a multitude of emotions. Confusion, disorientation, fear, anger, guilt and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey. All of your feelings are valuable and deserve attention. Choose to be around people who will allow you to share them unconditionally and without judging them to be right or wrong, good or bad.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits. Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you fatigued and drained. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. Do only what you feel ready for and don’t be pressured by others to do things you don’t want to do.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to experience grief “attacks.” Sometimes, out of nowhere, a power surge of grief may overwhelm you. This can be frightening, but is normal and

natural. Find someone who understands and will let you talk it out.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to make use of ritual. Look for ways to memorialize events such as anniversaries, birthdays and holidays. Ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. Ritual is a way for you to mourn. If others tell you that rituals are silly or unnecessary, don’t listen.

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 at God, find someone to talk with who won’t be critical of your feelings of hurt and abandonment.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to treasure your memories. Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. Instead of ignoring your memories, find others with whom you can share them.

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 questions may have answers, but some may not. Watch out for 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 always helpful and you do not have to accept them.



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YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to move toward your grief and heal. Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly. Remember that grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself; avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you are required to forget that the death of someone loved changes your life forever.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to laugh and be happy again. As you continue to journey through grief, and heal some of the pain that death has brought, your spirit may become lighter and you may find your sense of humor again and find joy in your surroundings. Celebrate these moments!

