
GRIEF RECOVERY PROGRAMS

Why they need to include a roadmap

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Why do so many fail to complete grief counseling sessions staged over several weeks?

I believe one of the reasons is because too many of the programs fail to provide a real roadmap to the healing griever's seek. Those who grieve aren't interested in hearing a lot of theory or advice that is short on substance.

They need actionable options, proven steps, and best practices they can employ as they begin their journey toward some semblance of a recovery.

This tendency to withdraw from what are well-intentioned resources should be of no surprise to anyone, especially when speaking about widowed men. While my view applies to men and women alike, as an advocate for widowers, I have come to recognize how men who are suffering from the most significant loss of their lives want to act to make their pain go away by taking concrete steps others have previously tested.

Those who fail to complete grief recovery programming are generally not interested in listening to subjective material offered by family members, friends, or a subject matter expert that are weak on specifics.

I like to tell the story of my brother Don and his wife Kathy when they were traveling by plane. As they sat in their seats, Kathy leaned over and informed Don how the little boy seated behind her was kicking the back of her seat. Being a man of action, Don looked over the top of his seat to the youngster seated behind Kathy and, with a raised voice, told the young man to, "Knock it off."

Kathy then leaned over and asked Don, "What did you do that for?"

Kathy went on to say how she didn't want Don to do anything; she just wanted him to know what she was experiencing.

But like most men, Don is a fixer.

Give him a problem, and his mental Rolodex of problem-solving solutions will begin rotating until the appropriate fix surfaces. It's what men (and many women) do!

Perhaps that's why I like plans. Documents that will help me navigate my way until I reach my desired destination or outcome. Plans should contain both strategic and tactical steps one can initiate along life's journey that will lessen the likelihood of their veering off course or wasting precious resources. I believe people prefer specific, well researched, and proven steps that will advance their agenda. When such insights are available, it can allow the reader's recovery instincts to be stimulated,

causing them to tweak the best practices of others until they conform to the reader's comfort zone. To this end, I offer the following.

Grief Recovery Rule #1 - Turn to Your Higher Power.

For those who believe in a higher power, turn to Him. Place your grief and your future into His trusted arms. There is no better place to be.

Grief Recovery Rule #2 - Grieve for as long as you wish.

Grief doesn't end. It evolves. There are no sequences or stages of grief you can anticipate occurring. So, don't let anyone tell you, "It's time to get back in the game," or "Get over it." Do so when you are good and ready, not before. If their nagging continues, make new friends.

Grief Recovery Rule #3 - Forgive yourself for any lingering regrets you may harbor.

If you were a caregiver, the spouse, or the life partner of the deceased, you might have some lingering regret. "I should have visited more often."

"Did I find him (or her) the best care possible?"

"I should have told him or her I loved them more often."

Regrets surface because deep down inside, you honestly loved that person, and you weren't sure if they truly knew it. I have some excellent news for you. They did. There is no need to second-guess your previous actions. You undoubtedly did the best you could under the circumstances. And you can be sure they appreciated your loving care. So, when you lay your head on your pillow tonight, go ahead and tell them again, "I love you!" They're listening.

Grief Recovery Rule #4 - Watch your health.

No matter how well anchored of a survivor or

caregiver you may believe yourself to be, are vulnerable. Now it's time to take care of *you!*

All caregivers and the widowed should be seen by their primary physician. As part of your exam, ask your doctor for a referral to a mental health professional. You know, someone with whom you can talk. You've been through a lot, and you may have suffered physically and don't realized it. Besides, you have others who are depending on you to recover from your grief. This caution is especially true for widowers since most men fail to take proper care of themselves, especially when they are called upon to serve as caregivers. Want a sampling of proof? Widowed men have a suicide rate that is 3 to 4 times higher than married men.

For those who have lost a spouse, be advised that your loss is the #1 stressor on the stress index scale. Regardless of how tough you think you are, the human body can only handle so much stress and just for a limited period before it can affect your health.

Here's more proof that those who grieve are vulnerable. According to the US Census Bureau, 700,000 people are widowed each year in the United States and will live on average another 14 years. Research has shown that if you are caring for a spouse and are between the ages of 66 and 96, you are at a 66% higher risk of dying than one who is not a caregiver. Sixty-five percent of those who are widowed (men or women) will experience a severe illness within twelve months.

Grief Recovery Rule #5 - Don't make any hasty decisions.

Countless widowed individuals have felt a need to make changes soon after experiencing a loss. Time and time again, they have proven why they should not have done so. Whether you are considering moving closer to your son or daughter or downsizing your residence, or

even proposing marriage to a new love interest, take your time in doing so. Ask for advice from those you admire and trust. When appropriate, talk with a licensed professional with the proper expertise and credentials, even if a fee is required to do so (be sure to check their references). You'll be glad you did.

Grief Recovery Rule #6 - Stay close to those you love.

"I'm fine" is the typical response a widower gives to one who is inquiring about their current state. No wonder 75% of a survivor's support base will vanish or, at the very least, be less available to the survivor following the loss of a spouse. Those who are suddenly unavailable may well include family members and friends.

The risk is that people who feel continually lonely have a 14% higher risk of premature death than those who do not. So, stop signaling that you are "fine" when you are not. No matter how manly a widower feels, they are *all vulnerable*. By maintaining close contact, your supporters are more likely to recognize how they need to remain engaged with you as you travel on your grief journey.

Grief Recovery Rule #7 - Allow those who care about you to assist you in dealing with your grief.

You are not the only one who is grieving. When friends and family tell you they want to help, make it easy for them to do so. Have them cut your lawn, handle your grocery shopping, or clean your pool for a few months (just kidding.) By allowing them to serve in some way, they feel like they have contributed to the healing of all who mourn, including themselves.

Grief Recovery Rule #8 - Communicate your needs or challenges.

Ask for help if you need it. Don't make people

guess. Failing to do so may cause your critical needs to be unaddressed while trivial tasks are handled. When appropriate, communicate your needs with a subject matter expert. From financial matters to your spirituality, legal issues to mental health examinations, lean on those service providers for guidance. Should you wish, feel free to contact my ministry, The Widower's Support Network (WSN), for advice and mentoring, a free service WSN offers to all widower, as well as their family members.

Grief Recovery Rule #9 - Grief groups are a tremendous resource for people in need of support.

Grief groups (aka support groups) can be very beneficial to those who grieve, so don't shy away from using their services. This goes for men too, especially those men who foolishly think they can go it alone. Among the leaders in support services for those who grieve are hospices, churches, civic groups, and more.

The sponsoring agency may have designed their program offerings themselves, or may use licensed programmings. The cost to attend such support groups are modest, with many available being free of charge.

Many support groups address the needs of individuals, caregivers, or survivors dealing with specific diseases or ailments. For example, PanCan has support groups across America for pancreatic cancer sufferers. Compassionate Friends is a terrific organization that supports families grieving the loss of a child. Using your computer's search engine, you can easily find support groups for virtually every kind of ailment or illness. For those who don't wish to attend meetings outside their home, you can find books, DVDs, and more available at *OpentoHope.com*, *GriefToolbox.com*, and *GriefDiaries.com*, all excellent resources for healing videos, books, and more.

Some who grieve may enjoy getting away from their current environment and enjoy a transformational journey at sea, featuring the nurturing and coaching made available from a world-class team of grief experts. Such experiences are available from The Grief Cruise (thegriefcruises.com). The beauty of such an outing is that it allows you to find yourself in a neutral arena, absent the trappings and triggers of everyday life and the memories you may find troubling.

Grief Recovery Rule #10 - Get on your feet and out of the house.

Widowed people need to reestablish their own relevance. It is essential to have a *purpose* when you rise out of bed each day. You can accomplish this in many ways.

Volunteering has been found by many to be the best grief recovery tool. Reach out to a nonprofit that supports a good cause, your church, or perform a kind gesture for someone who can't pay you back. Perhaps this is why I established the Widowers Support Network, as it provides me with such gratification. Besides, it gives me *purpose*.

Grief Recovery Rule #11 - Commemorate the life of your deceased loved one.

Perform charitable works in their name. Turn their articles of clothing into "Love Pillows" and give them to those they loved. Celebrate their birthday by joining forces with friends and family in aiding their favorite support group.

Grief Recovery Rule #12 - Never lose HOPE. (Hope Trilogy)

As Alexander Pope wrote, *hope springs eternal*. Feed your subconscious mind with healing thoughts offering reasons to have hope. *View*, *read*, and *listen* to the lessons learned and the opinions of those who have been where you are today. To begin, all who grieve (men and

women) should register at Widowers Support Network. Once registered, request your free copy of WSN's powerful **HOPE TRILOGY**, the story of three remarkable men and their mastery over adversity. Learn more at www.widowersupportnetwork.com.

Grief Recovery Rule #13 - Take Care of Business

As my deceased brother, Dan taught me when I was just a teenager, "Take care of business first." Failing to do so can cause significant hardship, if not expense, during the remainder of your grief journey.

While matters such as career preservation, legal affairs, and financial wellness may not be the first thing you address during your journey, putting off such essential matters can cause catastrophic outcomes later. Again, seek professional assistance when needed.

Grief Recovery Rule #14 - Consider acquiring grief relief from a Therapy or Service Dog.

"Therapy dogs bring comfort to those in need of companionship while Service dogs have been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability," according to the Americans with Disabilities Act." Across America, there are many animal shelters, SPCAs, and civic, service, and charitable organizations that have programs that can assist you in learning more. A supportive pooch is worth considering. Personally, I would run out and get a rescue dog from the local SPCA, even if it isn't a service dog.

Grief Recovery Rule #15 - Celebrate the life of the one you have lost by living yours; they would certainly want you to do so.

No explanation is needed.