

Recovering. Rebuilding.

By **Dot Franks, MA**

Thoughts and memories of your loved ones who have passed away are precious to you, and people truly can continue to live in your heart. If you have been a caregiver, you know how completely another person can fill your thoughts. It seems a necessary thing while you are caring for someone who is sick. What happens, though, after your loved one is no longer with you? Are you still preoccupied with thoughts of him or her and maybe even feel guilty if you break out of the pattern?

The Caregiver's Emotional Bank Account

Grief depletes your energy; and if you are to recover, it is necessary to think of your own needs. This is unusual for caregivers. Think in terms of a bank account into which you continuously make deposits and withdrawals. Each time you listen to the music you like, watch a sunset, laugh, spend time with uplifting people, enjoy good food, you are making a deposit.

Taking care of others, doing the painful work of grieving, and other difficult tasks, constitute withdrawals from your account. You can see that when withdrawals exceed deposits, you may find yourself without the resources to continue on. This is not to say that you should not take care of those who need you, and it is impossible to just tell yourself to stop grieving; but balancing things out will help you with all these things.

If you are not in the habit of thinking of yourself, you might want to reconsider. Just being aware that your needs matter is a start. Then ask yourself how often you make a deposit into your emotional bank account. Enjoying some kind of recreational activity and doing something you find comforting will fill this need.

Also, taking care of yourself physically is a vital deposit to your account. How often do you exercise? Are you eating healthy meals? Are you sleeping as many hours as you need? Are you using medications exactly as directed? Are you using alcoholic beverages more than you used to? Talk to your doctor about these important issues. Then decide whether you want to make any changes. Know you are worth the effort.

Taking Time Away from the Sadness of Grief

People who are grieving need to take time away from the sadness and other painful feelings their grief presents to them. As with physical exercise, constant grief exertion can be depleting. Distraction is necessary to prevent your energy from being used up. Crafts of all kinds can be a positive distraction, as

well as music, reading, walking in a pleasant area, fishing. Anything you enjoy can help you with this need. People and situations that make you laugh are really valuable now.

Grief takes a lot of time, energy, and attention; so sometimes you might not be able to function as well in the world of work, family, and friends as you're used to. It helps to relax your standards a little and alter your expectations just now. This need is normal.

Also, accept the grief and roll with the tides of it; cry — men, too. Talk about it. Share your grief with the family. Don't try to protect them with silence. Find a friend to talk to, also. If possible, talk to someone who has had a similar sorrow.

Caring for Yourself During Grief

Take care of yourself. Bereavement can be a threat to your health. Right now you may not care. That will change. You are important. Your life is valuable.

Eat well. Exercise. Return to your old program as soon as possible or start a new one. You will be in a better mood and you will sleep better. A long walk daily is good for many. Ask your doctor.

Get rid of imagined guilt. If you think you did things to deserve real guilt, see a counselor or minister. Even if guilt is justified, there are ways you can make amends and be forgiven. Accept your understanding of the loss. In time, you may know more.

Finally, please know that we hope whatever you are doing to cope right now is successful. Whatever you are doing to cope right now, we hope it is successful