

The Twelve Freedoms of Grief

By Dot Franks, MA

Here we are - well on our way to July already. It doesn't seem possible. To some of you it may seem that time is moving quickly. To others it may seem that time has slowed to a crawl. Grief can alter your sense of time. However it seems to you now, we are moving toward the time of year when Americans are celebrating freedom.

When you are grieving, celebrating seems different. Freedom seems different. Is there freedom in the midst of grief? Dr. Alan Wolfelt thinks there is, and he has written quite a lot on the subject. I am condensing his Twelve Freedoms of Grief for you here. I hope these freedoms ring true for you.

Freedom #1 – You have the freedom to realize that your grief is unique.

No one else has had the same relationships you have had. No one else knew the deceased person in the same way you did. No one else's support system is the same as yours, and no one else has the same mixture of cultural and spiritual beliefs as you. In short, you will grieve in a very personal way.

Freedom # 2 – You have the freedom to talk about your grief.

By expressing your thoughts and feelings openly, healing can begin and you can start to feel better. It is important to choose well when you are selecting the person you want to talk to, though. Seek out those who will listen without judging you.

Freedom #3 – You have the freedom to feel a multitude of emotions.

Your mind and spirit are responding to the loss of someone important, and your feelings may be moving through you like a roller coaster. This is normal. It is also normal to feel overwhelmed by your feelings.

Freedom #4 – You have the freedom to allow numbness.

You may feel absolutely nothing. Your heart may take awhile to catch up to your mind's knowledge of what has happened. That is all right. It is a kind of natural protection that occurs until our hearts are ready to tolerate what we don't want to believe.

Freedom #5 – You have the freedom to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits.

Grief causes fatigue. Your low energy level may impair your ability to think clearly and make decisions. It is all right to delay making decisions until you feel up to it. In the meantime, get plenty of rest, eat good nutritious food, and lower your expectations of yourself.

Freedom #6 – You have the freedom to feel grief attacks or emotional embraces.

You may feel surges of grief and flashbacks at unexpected times. Memories may overwhelm you. These occurrences are normal. It helps to talk to someone who is understanding. Give yourself freedom to talk.

Freedom #7 – You have the freedom to develop a support system.

Although reaching out to others may be difficult, work to find people who are willing to listen and let you be yourself.

Freedom # 8 – You have the freedom to make use of ritual.

Funerals are rituals that allow us to express our grief. Public grief is called mourning. It is important to mourn our losses. You may choose to perform a ritual such as planting a tree or some flowers in honor of your loved one. There may be something you could do that would be unique to your relationship to your loved one. Any small ceremony is helpful for healing grief.

Freedom # 9 – You have the freedom to embrace your spirituality.

Express that which has meaning and purpose to you in whatever ways seem right. Surround yourself with people, groups, or communities that support your beliefs. You may have been feeling hurt and abandoned and angry with God. This is sometimes a part of grief, and these feelings are normal.

Freedom # 10 – You have the freedom to search for meaning.

“Why” questions are a normal part of the healing process. Some questions have answers; some do not. Healing occurs as you have the opportunity to ask the questions, not necessarily in the answering of them. Find a support group or friend who will listen as you search for meaning.

Freedom # 11 – You have the freedom to cherish your memories.

Treasure your memories and share them with family and friends. Your memories keep love alive. Stories of your loved one remind you of your spiritual connection that can not be broken.

Freedom # 12 – You have the freedom to move through your grief and heal.

You have the right to keep your memories while leaving the pain behind. Healing does not mean getting over your loss. It means that you can be happy again and remember your loved one with smiles instead of tears.

We hope there has been something here that is useful to you. One important freedom you always have is to take what is helpful and leave the rest behind. We hope your July is good.

Just to see you smile – The Freedom to be Imperfect:

Two six-year-old boys in a religious school had been giving the teachers problems. The teachers had tried everything to make them behave – time outs, notes home, missed recesses – but could do nothing with them.

Finally the boys were sent to see the priest. The first boy went in and sat in a chair across the desk from the priest. Trying to help the youngster understand that God is everywhere and sees us - even when we are being naughty - the priest asked, “Do you know where God is?”

The little boy just sat there. The priest stood up and asked, “Do you know where God is?” The little boy trembled but said nothing. The priest leaned across the desk and again asked, “Do you know where God is?”

The little boy bolted out of his chair, rushed past his friend in the waiting room, and ran all the way home. He got under the bed and pulled his jacket up over his head. His friend followed him home. He came into the bedroom and asked, “What happened in there with the priest?” The boy replied, “God is missing, and they think we did it!”