

And here are some reflection questions to ponder:

What changes have you seen in yourself (new attitudes, insights, skills) since the death? _____

What could you do in your present and future life to honor the life of the person who died? _____

Things I can continue doing to help myself heal: _____

New things I can begin doing to help myself heal: _____

The harshness of winter is gone and spring brings the hope of new life; for it is a different season.



High Peaks Hospice
& Palliative Care Inc.

Dignity, comfort and peace at the end of life.

After the First Year



Death is not extinguishing the light; it is putting out the lamp, because the dawn has come.

Tagore

After the First Year is the last publication in the grief information series. This publication will spotlight:

- ✿ Accomplishments you may have experienced
 - ✿ Suggestions for the next year
 - ✿ Warning signs of severe depression
- ✿ Journaling exercises: measuring your progress

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First Year Accomplishments

Although you may feel you have accom-

plished very little over the last year, many small victories may have gone unnoticed:

- You had patience to accept and live through the initial shock and disbelief of your loss.
- You demonstrated willpower when you got up each morning to face yet another day without your loved one.
- You may have learned to do things your loved ones always did, like balancing the checkbook, cooking, cleaning, mowing the lawn, washing the windows, winterizing the home, having the car repaired, etc.
- You showed courage when you worked on your grief, confronting the pain of your loss.
- And although you will never completely “get over” your grief, you have been

Suggestions for the Next Year

The first year of grief is painful and exhausting. You have experienced many “firsts” without your loved one: birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and other special events. No doubt you found the days leading up to and the day of these special events difficult. Although you may feel a little better, you also may not feel nearly as healed as you would like. It helps to understand that for many, the first year following the death feels like a tearing down of life and the second year feels like a rebuilding of life. Some of the suggestions below may help as you continue to navigate your way to your new life:

- ✿ Setting expectations that are too high can cause frustration and disappointment. Be kind to yourself by setting reasonable goals.
- ✿ As you continue to confront the reality of the death, you realize how it is going to affect you for the rest of your life. Adjust at your own pace.
- ✿ Other situations (trouble with work, family members, or friends) may add to the burden of your grief and may make it more difficult. This happens to many grieving people.
- ✿ You may or may not cry often, but when you do, know that it is helpful. Do not fight the tears.
- ✿ Check often to make sure you have balance in your life: work, fun, exercise, hobbies, reading, and rest.
- ✿ Pick out your most pressing concerns and think of all possible solutions. Choose one solution at a time and try it.

Grief and Depression

It is important to be aware that constant depression can slow your recovery from your loss. Below is a simple test to help you decide whether your depression is severe enough that you should talk with your doctor about seeking treatment. *If you are suffering from severe depression you will experience symptoms every day for two weeks or more.*

Instructions: check the boxes that apply to you:

- A deep sense of sadness or unhappiness
 - A lack of interest in things you used to enjoy, such as hobbies or friends
- With severe depression, you will have at least one of the previous symptoms and at least four of the following symptoms every day for two weeks or more.*
- Unintentional weight gain or weight loss
 - Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
 - Trouble remembering, thinking or making decisions
 - Restlessness or decreased activity
 - Fatigue or lack of energy
 - Irritability or being easily annoyed
 - Sleeping too little or too much
 - Thoughts of death or suicide; attempted suicide

Adapted from “Depression (Major Depression)” on MayoClinic.com

Journaling Exercises

As time goes by, your ongoing “grief spasms” may lead to a sense of discouragement, as you think, “I should be over this,” or “why does this still hurt so much?” Finding healing for your grief does not mean that you will never feel pain over your loss again. It simply means that you continue to miss the person who played such an important part in your life. To determine the degree to which you are experiencing healing, ask yourself these questions to compare where you are now with where you were a year ago:

- ✿ Is less of my time taken up with actions or thoughts that are negative and self-destructive?
- ✿ Am I able to integrate at some level into social situations?
- ✿ Am I able to talk about my loved one without experiencing great emotional pain or despair?
- ✿ Can I perform my job and concentrate on the task at hand?
- ✿ Are my dreams of my loved one any more pleasant and reassuring?
- ✿ Do I enjoy any close relationships with other people?
- ✿ Am I genuinely interested in other things and other people?
- ✿ Am I able to smile and laugh without feeling guilty?
- ✿ Have my values changed since the death?