

A Year Later
**ANNIVERSARY
OF LOSS**

Jason Troyer, PhD



This booklet answers common questions about grief at the one year anniversary after a loss. It provides strategies for how to adjust to life without your loved one while never forgetting them. I hope you find it helpful.

Sincerely,
Jason Troyer PhD



While I hope your grief has lessened over the past year, I want you to know it is common and normal to still feel grief. Most people continue to feel that there is a hole in their life even a year later. I wrote this booklet to provide you with comfort, hope, and information as you continue to transition to a life after the death of your loved one.

I have included information on common questions about grief, preparing for the anniversary of your loved one's death, and other topics.



As the Anniversary Approaches

It is normal for you to think of your loved one as the anniversary of their death approaches. You may feel more grief during this time, but this does not mean that you are “backsliding” or doing something wrong. Many bereaved people are very aware of the specific date of their loved one’s death. For others, a specific season or holiday may be associated with the loss. For example, if your loved one died in early October, you may associate their death with the cooler temperatures or the changing leaves of autumn.

Many people are concerned about how they will react on the anniversary of the loss. I recommend that you have a specific plan for that day. Having a plan can help you feel like you have more control. Furthermore, you can use part of the day to honor your loved one. This doesn’t mean you must schedule every minute of the day. I recommend that you create a plan that allows you to both honor your loved one as well as take care of yourself.

Is My Grief Taking Too Long?

People grieve at different rates and there is no timetable for how long one should experience grief. Because our society tends to expect people to recover quickly after a loss, many bereaved people assume they are not grieving quickly enough. I believe it is more important to examine your ability to continue to accomplish the important tasks of living. For example, are you able to keep yourself and your living space clean? Are you able to maintain your physical health? After a few weeks or months, are you able to return to work or other important tasks?

There is not a specific answer for the question, “How long should grief take?” But it is normal to feel grief after the death of a close loved one for several months to a few years. In most cases your grief should not feel as intense a

year after your loss. However, you may feel your grief fluctuate throughout the first year based on various reminders, stress, significant days (anniversaries, birthdays, holidays, etc.), and other factors.

Did I Rush Through My Grief Too Quickly?

Perhaps you are concerned that you rushed through your grief too quickly. (Or perhaps your family or friends think that your grief didn't last long enough). Sometimes this is because you grieve in a very private way and others don't know what you do or how often you think about your loved one. Perhaps your grief process simply does not take as long as others.

Forewarning of a loved one's death may influence your grief. Your loved one may have experienced a long illness and you had time to prepare for their death. Thus, your grief actually started long before your loved one's death. Furthermore, your grief may be balanced by knowing that your loved one is no longer suffering.

Only you can assess your grief process fairly and determine if you have rushed through it too quickly. Signs that you may have hurried the grief process include: not wanting to ever think or talk about the deceased, not having private moments of reflection on what has been lost, or trying to convince yourself or others that nothing has changed in your life. These may be signs that you are avoiding your loss and you may benefit from professional assistance. It is best not to compare your loss with others or to try to have a specific timeline for your grief.

How Do I Achieve Closure or Resolution?

Now that it is a year after your loss, you might think that you should have “closure”. That depends on what you mean by closure. Some people assume that closure means they will never again feel sadness or pain regarding their loved one’s death. For most people, this is not a realistic goal. While the vast majority of bereaved people find they are doing much better within a year or two, they also report they still feel some grief at times. A more reasonable goal is to get to the point where you are not feeling intense pain every time you think about your loved one.

It is normal if you still occasionally cry or feel grief. Our society often tries to rush the grieving process and condense it to days or weeks instead of months and years. While your grief should not be as intense as it was immediately following the death, continuing to think about your loved one and occasionally feeling grief and sadness are completely normal.

Do I Have to Forget My Loved One?

There is a longstanding grief myth that it is necessary to eventually “let go” or forget our deceased loved ones. We now know that this is not a healthy and adaptive way to grieve. Instead, it is healthy and normal to maintain some “continuing bonds” with your loved one after their death. These bonds may include thinking and dreaming about them, talking to them and about them, visiting a gravesite or special place, and other ways of feeling connected to them. I believe these different ways of honoring and remembering your loved one can be an important part of the grief process, even if others don’t understand why it is so important.

Should I Get Professional Help?

It may be possible that you could benefit from professional counseling or a support group. Here are some signs you may need professional help:

- ❖ You feel that you are “stuck” in your grief in some way.
- ❖ Your grief has not lessened (or has gotten worse) after a year.
- ❖ Your feelings of guilt or anger have not diminished.
- ❖ You can't say your loved one's name or you won't allow others to talk about them.
- ❖ You experience grief, depression, and/or anxiety that impairs your ability to take care of yourself, be effective in your work, or maintain your relationships with others.
- ❖ You experience thoughts of self-harm or suicide.
(Always seek help in these situations)
- ❖ Your use of alcohol, medications, or substances impairs your ability to be a fully-functioning person.



Honoring & Remembering Your Loved One

There are many different ways to honor and remember your loved one. You may have already carried out some of these suggestions over the past year. However, I have provided this list because you may be looking for some different ways to honor your loved one, or perhaps you are finally ready to try some of these strategies.

- ❖ Create a photo album, scrapbook, memory book, video montage, or other visual way to remember your loved one.
- ❖ Volunteer for or contribute to an organization whose mission you support.
- ❖ Keep a special reminder with you such as a picture, special jewelry, or something else of significance.
- ❖ Share stories about your loved one with family and friends.
- ❖ Visit their place of final rest or other meaningful places.

Need More Help?

Visit www.GriefPlan.com for helpful videos and articles to help you heal, remember, and rebuild after loss. These resources cover topics such as:

- ❖ Helping children as they grieve
- ❖ Healing after the loss of a spouse, parent, child, and other loved ones
- ❖ Dealing with traumatic losses due to suicide, overdose, and accidents
- ❖ Recognizing signs that you may need professional help
- ❖ A step-by-step video program to help you through your grief

About the Author

Dr. Jason Troyer earned his master's degree in counseling and his doctorate in counseling psychology. He is a published author, grief researcher, and former college professor and therapist.

© 2022 Jason Troyer PhD