



Your Grief Journey and the Four Dimensions of Self

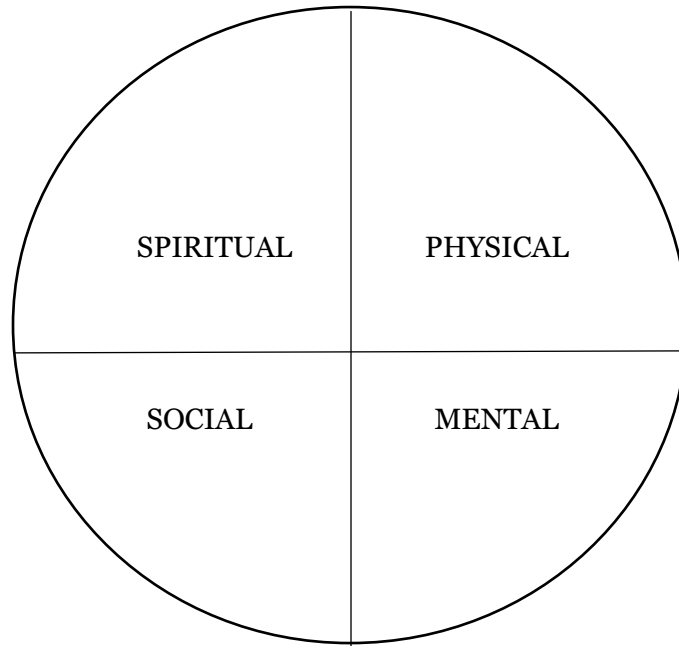
By Cassandra Van Dyck

Losing a loved one is never easy. When you lose someone that you've been caring for, it can compound and complicate grief. You might be surprised at the emotions that are coming up for you. Along with sadness, you could be feeling relief if your journey has been long and hard. If you have been spending a great deal of time caring for your loved one, you might not be sure how to restructure your life. You've likely settled in to a sort of routine with the person you're caring for, and finding your way without them needing you might feel strange and unsettling.

There is no roadmap for grief. It can come and go and shift in to different emotions. You might feel fine one moment and then be triggered by a scent or an object that reminds you of your spouse or parent.

Grief can be overwhelming and you might think sometimes that you will never feel better, or that there is nothing you can do to shift the weight of sadness that rests on you after the passing of someone you loved. It is important to allow yourself to grieve – to feel the sadness or anger or confusion. You are entitled to feel any way that you feel. Accepting your emotions is a big part of your grief journey, yet it is not the only thing that you can do to support your well-being and healing process.

Grief can be exhausting. You might be feeling so many different things that it's hard to sort through what parts of your life could use some nourishment. Taking a look at your "dimensions of self" can help you to see where you need support and help you decide how to get it. Your spirituality, physical health, social life, and mental health are all connected. When you neglect one, it affects your ability to accept and adjust to loss. Use the reflection questions below as a guideline to take inventory and make a plan for support.



Physical

Think about how you're feeling physically: whether your muscles are tense and if you feel rested and relaxed. Have you been making time for exercise? Are you eating a balanced diet?

Add a 30 minute walk in to your daily routine. Schedule an appointment with an RMT for a massage. Create a bedtime routine that emphasizes relaxation. Make a cup of tea, have a bath, and spend some time writing in a journal. If you're finding it hard to cook for yourself, look in to accessing a meal or grocery delivery program.

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Mental

How are you feeling in your head and in your heart? If you are grieving the loss of a loved one, it's expected that you will not be feeling 100%. You might be feeling anxious or depressed, or angry, sad, and confused. Although these are common emotions when grieving, it is still important to reflect on your mental state so you can best support those feelings and move through them at your own pace

Read and look at things that make you feel calm and inspire you. Comforting poetry, beautiful music, and maybe a funny television show are some examples. Make sure to avoid excessive or violent TV and literature.

Social

Have you been spending time with people that support and listen to you? Have you been

spending a bit too much time alone? Are there unanswered voice mails on your phone or emails from people who care about you?

It is common to withdraw when you are grieving. Alone time can be healing and comforting, but try to resist the urge to spend too much time by yourself. Connecting with people who care about you or with folks who have also experienced loss can be comforting and provide immeasurable support. If you lost touch with friends on your caregiving journey, reach out to them now. It is like that friends will have missed spending time with you and will be happy to hear from you again. Consider attending a grief group. North Shore Family Services and North Shore Hospice both offer an 8-week series, and the Widows' Network offers support groups as well.

“Be creative. Trust your instincts. Cry when you want to, laugh when you can,” says Pat Schwiebert & Chuck DeKlyen, authors of *Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss*. Always remember that there is support when you need or want it, and reach out.

Spiritual

Do you have a spiritual practice that uplifts you? Are you a part of a faith-based group? Is there something in your life that you do that makes you feel connected to something larger than yourself?

Connect with your faith-based group and make time for your spiritual practice. If you're struggling to connect with spirituality, spend time doing an activity that lights you up and makes you feel alive. It could be meditation, walking in the forest, or swimming in the ocean. Some say they connect with their spirituality when they're playing music or creating art.

It is important to honor yourself on your grief journey. Everyone experiences grief differently, and some days will be easier than others. Remember to practice self-kindness and not to expect too much from yourself. Surround yourself with people who support and love you and protect yourself from people and situations that feel unsupportive or overwhelming.

The Thing Is, By Ellen Bass

to love life, to love it even
when you have no stomach for it
and everything you've held dear
crumbles like burnt paper in your hands,
your throat filled with the silt of it.
When grief sits with you, its tropical heat
thickening the air, heavy as water
more fit for gills than lungs;

when grief weights you like your own flesh
only more of it, an obesity of grief,
you think, How can a body withstand this?
Then you hold life like a face
between your palms, a plain face,
no charming smile, no violet eyes,
and you say, yes, I will take you
I will love you, again.