

# Dealing with Grief

Sadness and grief are natural reactions to changes in familiar habits due to death, divorce, moving, graduation, retirement, illness, and even vacations. All of these involve loss that can be painful for two reasons:

- They bring up core beliefs about the nature of existence – “I’m alone.” “I’m responsible.” “I’m lost.” “I have no purpose.” “I’m incomplete.” “I’m vulnerable.”
- They make us face “unfinished business” from a situation or relationship: resentments, regrets, unspoken appreciation, and unmet expectations.

It is not time or keeping busy that heals the painful wounds of loss, but creating a new definition of yourself and completing what was not finished in the relationship.

## **COMPLETE UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

No matter how good a relationship or a situation is, it is a work in progress and therefore incomplete. As soon as you experience a loss, your mind reviews and searches for what was never communicated. This review continues intermittently until it is completed. The following show how you can help the process by communicating your regrets, resentments, unspoken appreciation, and unmet dreams to a mental image of the person who is gone, in a letter that you may never send, or to the eyes of a friend in role play.

### **Make Amends**

- Pinpoint your mistakes: Take responsibility for your contribution to any problems in the relationship, but only for your part! There are usually some positive consequences from even the worst blunders.
- Express your regret: “I am sorry for...”
- Express the (unrealistic) wish behind regrets: “I wish I had (could have)...” Identify a specific action that could have made the situation different.
- Change your pattern: In future situations, act out any realistic wishes you identified. Even if you are unable to do this with the person who is gone, you still make amends by being different with others.
- Do not ask for forgiveness: Forgiveness is entirely the choice of the “injured” party. If the other person is deceased, you can imagine how they could respond to you.

### **Let Go of Resentments**

- Identify any power you gave up or lost: Resentment comes from a loss of power.
- Identify the power or choices you now have: As you grow, you gain options. It may be difficult to let go of resentment until you know you can fulfill past unmet needs.
- Express your past resentment and newfound power as a statement: “I resented you for...but now I can (plan to)...”
- Do not tell people you forgive them. Often, this is perceived as an attack. Instead, let them know when you are doing OK. This releases both you and them. It is your responsibility to recover from any of your past hurts.

### **Express Unspoken Gratitude, Dreams, and Future Plans**

- “I want you to know...”