

The Grieving Person's Bill of Rights

Adapted from Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt by Dr. Rachael D. Nolan (2022)

- ***You have the right to experience your own unique grief.*** No one else will grieve in exactly the way you do. You are the only person in the world who can know your grief. So, when you turn to others for help, don't allow them to tell you what you should or should not be feeling.
- ***You have the right to listen to and talk about your grief.*** You are the only person who has the power to listen to what your grief is communicating to you. Intentionally not ignoring or blocking its advances, and openly talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will listen and allow you to talk as much as you want, and as often as you want, about your grief.
- ***You have the right to be tolerant you your physical and emotional limits.*** Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. Avoid substances that can dull or numb your feelings. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel ready to do.
- ***You have the right to experience 'grief fog.'*** Loss engages the fight or flight mechanism, which releases specific hormones, that increase blood pressure and heart rate. This process can be exhausting for the body, causing changes in memory, behavior, sleep, bodily function, and the immune system. It can also lead to cognitive effects, referred to as grief fog.
- ***You have the right to shut someone down when what they are saying is harmful to you and your grieving process.*** People say the strangest things when a person is grieving. Though people may have good intentions, what they say can be harmful and may cause you more pain. If you feel hurt, try saying "Thank you, but that is not what I need to hear right now" or "I appreciate you're trying to help, but I would rather handle this in my own way."
- ***You have the right to experience 'grief attacks.'*** Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of emotion may overcome you. Believe it or not, this is normal and natural. Find someone who understands the grieving process and will be a heart with ears to listen while you talk it out.
- ***You have the right to make use of ritual.*** A ritual after loss does more than acknowledge your own unique experience with grief. It can help connect you to supportive, positive energy and is an important part of the mourning process. If others tell you that rituals are silly or unnecessary, don't listen. Do what feels right for you.
- ***You have the right to embrace your spirituality.*** If spirituality is a part of your life, express it in ways that seems appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who respect and support your spiritual practices and beliefs.
- ***You have the right to search for meaning.*** You may find yourself asking, "Why did (s)he/they have to die?" or "Why is this happening?" or "What am I going to do now?" Some of your questions may have answers, and some may not. Comments such as "(s)he/they is in a better place" or "time heals all wounds" or "you need to be strong" or "I know how you feel" are not helpful and you do not have to accept them.
- ***You have the right to treasure your memories.*** Memories are one of the best ways to connect with both good and bad aspects of your grief. You will always remember, so instead of ignoring your memories, find others with whom you can share them.
- ***You have the right to say "NO" and to "NOT be Okay."*** Often times, people feel inclined to attempt to 'cheer-up' a grieving person through distractions or by inviting them to social outings and events; particularly during the holidays. While grieving, it is perfectly normal for you to not be okay, and to choose to not attend events where you don't feel emotionally safe.
- ***You have the right to move forward in your grief and heal.*** The only cure for grief is to grieve. Better stated, grief is a process, and not an event for which healing will not happen quickly. Be patient, tolerant, and kind with yourself. Chances are that your loss has changed your life in unimaginable ways; some for the worse, perhaps, and some for the better.