

# HOW TO HAVE A Better Relationship



A guide to making peace with grief and  
giving yourself extra grace as a widow

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# Introduction

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Grief is hard work.

It requires more energy than you ever thought possible and working through the wide range of emotions associated with widowhood is exhausting.

We know, We've been there.

And want you to know - unequivocally - that things do get better with time.

We've been in your shoes where the pain of your spouse or life partner's death makes it hard to see a future that isn't saddled with suffering forever and ever. But we also know that future exists because we're living it.

The one thing we know for sure is that everything will be OK. If it's any comfort, countless other widows are living proof that you can survive - and even thrive - in widowhood.

You might not believe it yet, but you will. We all figure it out eventually.

In the meantime, use the gentle reminders in this guide to learn how to have a better relationship with grief and give yourself extra grace as a widow.

“  
Grief never ends, but it  
changes. It is a passage,  
not a place to stay. Grief  
is not a sign of weakness,  
nor a lack of faith. It is  
the price of love.

”

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# 01 Make Room for Grief

No matter how hard you try to ignore grief, it keeps showing up, right?

We all learn eventually that we can't escape grief. We simply learn how to make room for it.

Yes, easier said than done

Because grief is hard. It hurts. And it's really freaking uncomfortable. But on the other side of that discomfort is growth and healing and even opportunity.

When you start making room for grief you learn that grief can, and must, coexist with all of your other emotions. You can be angry at the injustice of it all and bitter about your circumstances AND accept grief as part of the human experience. Making room for grief helps you learn how to live with your loss in a healthy way.



Grief's job is to open you up to healing by teaching you to understand yourself, your situation, and your potential.

With understanding comes healing.

With healing comes strength.

# What is Your Grief Trying to Tell You?

You can learn from grief if you accept it and allow its presence to teach you something about yourself. What is your grief trying to tell you?

Why does it show up at 4:30 every afternoon or while buying peanut butter at Costco? Why does it stop by every third Thursday or when you see a black-capped chickadee?

We're all on a different grief journey so our answers might be different from your answers. But it's important to ask the question grief is begging you to ask. Instead of avoiding grief, try asking, "What do you want me to know?"

The biggest lesson we've learned so far is that pain and happiness can coexist. Painful moments don't define you any more than happy moments do. You need to have both to learn how to live a full and unapologetic life.

You don't always love grief's company, but you should come to accept it. You and grief need to understand each other now. Don't try to dodge grief and it won't overstay its welcome.

It's a win-win.

## What does your grief want you to know?

- 1 You can do hard things
- 2 It's OK to grieve and be sad and mourn
- 3 Pain and happiness can peacefully coexist within you
- 4 You can do hard things
- 5 Vulnerability is necessary for personal growth

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*We think the point is to pass the test or overcome the problem, but the truth is that things don't really get solved. They come together and they fall apart. Then they come together again and fall apart again. It's just like that. The healing comes from letting there be room for all of this to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy.*

- PEMA CHODRON



# 02

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## Practice Self-Care



*Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you*  
- Anne Lamott

You can't help others if you aren't taking care of yourself first. It's non-negotiable. Remember how the flight attendants tell you to put on your oxygen mask before helping anyone else? You are no good to anyone if you aren't fully functional first.

Practicing self-care should be as much a part of your day as brushing your teeth. Grief will suck the marrow out of your soul and you can't make peace with grief if you don't continually replenish yourself with the love and attention you deserve. Little bits of attention paid to your body and soul will reap huge rewards in the way you handle stress, conflict and change.

## Self-Care Doesn't Have to Be Expensive

Self-care doesn't have to be anything monumental or expensive. There are plenty of ideas like:

- taking a 15-minute power nap to shut-down your spinning mind for a few minutes every day
- doing a quick Yoga sequence or a 5-minute stretch to help increase your productivity
- reducing clutter in one room to decrease your stress level
- drinking water to hydrate and keep your digestive tract moving in the right direction
- turn off your phone and engage in an activity that doesn't require Wi-Fi
- spend 15 minutes in the sun for a boost of Vitamin D

## Volunteer

Grief can be so time-consuming and exhausting. Sometimes it's best to put your energy into helping others instead of worrying about who isn't helping you. Grief, anger, and resentment decrease when you're actively engaged in supporting others in need.

## Schedule Doctors' Appointments You've Been Putting Off

Have you been neglecting yourself so much that you don't make the doctor appointments you know you need to make? Schedule that mammogram, physical or eye appointment you've been putting off. Grief is harder to handle when you've got those nagging to-dos that keep piling up.

Make the appointments and start taking better care of you.





# 03

## Accept Others' Limitations

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*God only gives us what we can handle. Apparently, God thinks I'm a badass.*

## People Will Say Stupid and Insensitive Things

Most people won't understand your grief journey and that's OK. It's not their journey.

They will say stupid and insensitive things, they will put a time limit on your grief and they might even avoid you. All these things have happened to countless other widows.

Well-meaning people continue to spew the ridiculous platitudes that mean absolutely nothing. And all the while you listen and scratch your head and think, *you have no idea what I'm going through!*

To make peace with grief, we must

accept others' limitations.

People want to say something, *anything*, to make the awkward encounter with the grieving widow less awkward.

The problem is, it's awkward because no good words exist to say to someone whose spouse or life partner died.

You probably didn't know what to say to those who were grieving before you became the griever.

Maybe the best thing you can do is let others off the hook for not knowing what to say or how to say it.

### You've Probably Heard These Pitiful Platitudes:

- ✓ Time heals all wounds
- ✓ He's in a better place
- ✓ God doesn't give you more than you can handle
- ✓ I know how you feel
- ✓ You're young and can remarry

# 04 Reclaim Your Power



It seems counterintuitive to be thankful during grief. Where, exactly, do gratitude and happiness fit into a life of misery?

Well, first of all, if you think you're living a life of misery, guess what? You're living a life of misery. But if you reevaluate your quality of life, chances are you really aren't as miserable as you think.

What if instead of committing to a life of misery, you decided to be grateful for the good things in your life instead? You're in control of how you think and feel at any given moment. If you remind yourself of the good things in your life it's virtually impossible to be miserable forever.

## What Can You Be Grateful For?

- your morning cup of coffee
- the adorable birds chirping outside your window
- the (literal) roof over your head that didn't lose a single shingle in the last massive storm
- vanilla ice-cream with chocolate-cherry sauce
- Social Security survivor benefits

If you can't come up with at least three things to be grateful for today, you've given grief too much control.

It's time to reclaim your power.

Grab a pencil and a piece of paper. Better yet, download our gratitude diary. Or, you can do this on the computer, your phone or tablet, or anywhere you can enter text.

Write down three things you are grateful for. No need to be profound or witty.

Just grateful.

Think about the things that bring you joy no matter how trivial it seems.

When you do this simple exercise of writing down three things you're grateful for, you realize you're in charge of your life, not grief. You can't avoid grief and you need to accept that it's here to stay, but you can also stop giving grief all of your power.

It's OK not to be OK some of the time. We need our tears and tantrums and walks on the dark side. But, it all evens out. Be sad. Be angry. Cry. And then be grateful that you woke up breathing today.

You = 1. Grief = 0.

# THE WOLVES WITHIN AN OLD CHEROKEE LEGEND

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An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. "A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy.

"It is a terrible fight between two wolves. One is evil - he is anger, envy, sorry, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego."

He continued, "the other is good - he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith."

"The same fight is going on inside you and every other person, too."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "which wolf will win?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "the one you feed."



# 05

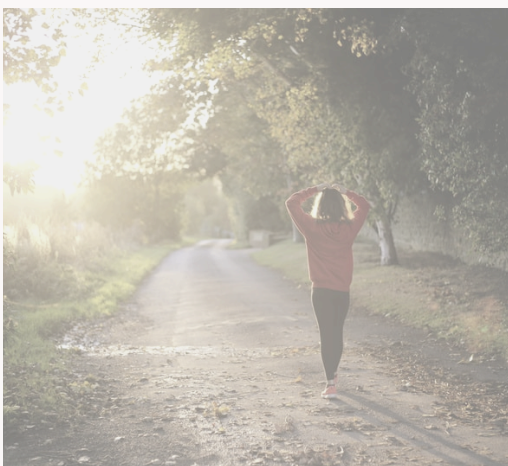
# Walk Your Worries Away

*Really? I'm experiencing the most profound pain I've ever experienced in my life and I can barely make it through the day. I cry all day and my stress level is at an all-time high. I can't think straight, see straight, or stand straight. You expect me to drag my ass out of bed and try to fit in exercise now, too?*

Yes. Yes, we do.

The thing about exercise is it is *scientifically* proven to release endorphins (chemicals in the brain that act as natural painkillers), prevent disease and reduce stress. We won't drone on about the benefits of exercise here.

Just Google "exercise and stress" and see for yourself. It's on the Internet. It must be true 😊!



Seriously, though, the benefits of exercise are indisputable.

Considering you're going through an intense and physically exhausting grief experience, you need the stress-busting benefits of good old-fashioned exercise.

You don't need to join an expensive gym or

find a pricey yoga class unless that's your thing. All you really need are some good, supportive walking shoes. Walking is a no-cost, highly effective workout that busts stress, boosts creativity, and lowers blood pressure.

If you take it a step further (pun totally intended) you could listen to your favorite podcast and learn something new at the same time.

Booyah!

We know all the excuse. Do these sound familiar?

- I don't have enough time
- I can't leave my kids home alone
- My hip hurts
- I can't afford new walking shoes
- It's too cold outside
- The moon is in its 3rd quarter phase

Skip the excuses and just start walking or doing whatever it takes to get your body moving. You'll feel better. We promise.

Stress? Anxiety? Depression?

So long, suckahs!



All truly great thoughts are conceived by walking

- Friedrich Nietzsche