

# SEVEN BEREAVEMENT THEMES<sup>1</sup>

## 1) Understanding and Accepting grief

What tools and resources can you use to learn more about grief and help integrate it in your life? For example, books, workshops, support groups, storytelling, counseling, and talking about previous losses to help understand the inevitability of loss and the normalization of grief. Understand that it's normal to feel sad. The idea is not to erase or "overcome" your sadness, but to find a way to carry it and integrate it.

## (2) Managing Painful Emotions

How do you handle strong emotions? For example, journaling, exercise, being in nature, meditation, expressive arts, prayer or ceremony. Start with small emotions, such as sadness, because they're easier to name. Then address bigger emotions, such as hopelessness or betrayal. Draw a picture of the feeling, and make friends with it. These emotions are not your enemy; they can lead you to deeper connection with your heart, with your relationships, with your future and with your spiritual path.

## (3) Planning for a Meaningful Future

The future can be short term, even just tomorrow, or later today. What are you doing tomorrow? What are your plans for the weekend? Or in the long term, is there a vacation, a career change, or an important event coming up? Place positive, predictable markers in the future.

## (4) Strengthening Ongoing Relationships

Accept help from friends. Don't be afraid to initiate social contact, but curate the advice you're getting. Cut off toxic relationships and strengthen healthy ones. Reach out for social opportunities.

## (5) Telling the Story of the Death

That's what counseling and support groups are for, but don't get stuck in the story. There are many ways to tell the story... write it or draw it, create rituals to express it. Keep a journal of dreams and visions.

## (6) Learning to Live with Reminders

Reminders don't always have to be sad. They can be *bittersweet*. Tender, not terrible. Reframe those reminders as sacred moments and sacred memories rather than painful experiences by creating rituals, representational objects, memorial activities, etc. It can be sacred instead of sorrowful.

## (7) Establishing an Enduring Connection with the Person who Died.

Continue their legacy, take up their hobbies or finish their projects. Get a tattoo. Change your name. Talk to them. This enduring connection can be very helpful with unresolved issues such as guilt and forgiveness. Imagine if you could ask them to forgive you. What would they say?

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<sup>1</sup> Iglewicz, A., Shear, M. K., Reynolds, C. F., 3rd, Simon, N., Lebowitz, B., & Zisook, S. (2020). Complicated grief therapy for clinicians: An evidence-based protocol for mental health practice. *Depression and anxiety*, 37(1), 90–98.  
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