

The Grieving Person's Bill of Rights

Though you should reach out to others as you do the work of mourning, you should not feel obligated to accept the unhelpful responses you may receive from some people. You are the one who is grieving, and as such, you have certain "rights" no one should try to take away from you.

The following list is intended both to empower you to heal and to help you decide how others can and cannot help. This is not to discourage you from reaching out to others for help, but rather to assist you in distinguishing useful responses from hurtful ones.

You have the right to experience your own unique grief.

No one else will grieve in exactly the same way you do. 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 talk about your grief.

Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk about your grief as much as you want, as often as you want.

You have the right to feel a multitude of emotions.

Confusion, disorientation, fears, guilt and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey. Others may try to tell you that feeling angry, for example, is wrong. Don't take these judgmental responses to heart. Instead, find listeners who will accept your feeling without condition.

You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits.

Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and your mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. Don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel ready to do.

You have the right to experience grief "attacks."

Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but is normal and natural. Find someone who understands and will let you talk it out.

You have the right to make use of ritual.

The funeral ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. More important, the funeral is a way for you to mourn. If others tell you that rituals such as these are silly or unnecessary. Don't listen.

You have the right to embrace your spirituality.

If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate for you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you feel angry with God, find someone to talk with who won't be critical of your feelings of hurt and abandonment.