

Four Tasks of Grief

“There is no way around the pain that you naturally feel when someone you love dies. You can’t go over it, under it, or around it. Going through it is what will help you heal.”
Therese Rando,

Author William Worden created a theory called the Four Tasks of Grief. He intentionally uses the word “task” because a task is a chore. It is work and requires effort. Grief is a process. Understanding these tasks may help you understand your journey. Time does not heal all wounds. It is what you do with time that makes the difference.

Task 1: To Accept the Reality of the Loss - Even though your head understands the death has occurred, your heart doesn’t want to believe it. For a split second you might expect to see your loved one walk through the door, think you hear their voice, or even reach for the phone to call, until you remember that your loved one has died. Talking about your loved one, telling stories, reminiscing, or journaling may all be ways to help bring the head and heart together.

Task 2: To Work Through the Pain of Grief - It is normal to experience intense physical and emotional pain following the death of a loved one. Society is often uncomfortable with powerful emotions, and the support you once received immediately following the death may begin to decline after several months. This can be very confusing, hurtful, and even send a subtle message that you should be “over this”. Remember grief is a process, and giving yourself permission to feel the pain of the loss is a necessary part of this process.

Task 3: To Adjust to an Environment without the Deceased - This task includes making the necessary adjustments in your life as a result of the death. It may include learning to do the chores your spouse did, such as cutting the grass, doing the laundry or managing the finances. It might also mean finding new friends, interests or hobbies. Many people search for meaning in the death and use this experience as an opportunity to reassess their values, priorities and goals.

Task 4: To Emotionally Relocate the Deceased to a Place of Memory - This is where you begin to invest your energy in people, activities and life again. You may begin to find enjoyment in life again. You accept your loved one will not return, but understand the love you have for that person will never die. You realize life will move forward and you can move forward with it.

Adapted from J. William Worden’s book: Grief Counseling & Grief Therapy

For more information, contact your nearest Cedar Valley Hospice office or visit cvhospice.org. Waterloo: 319.272.2002