

Ten lessons about dealing with — and living with — grief

We will all deal with tremendous pain and grief at various points in our lives. How we get through those times will set the stage for the level of peace and happiness we reach going forward. Here are ten strategies that can help you overcome the worst that life may throw your way.



This report was selected especially for you by Falkenberg-Poetz & Pidhirniak Wealth

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Key takeaways

- Grief should be accepted — not blocked or denied.
- Use tools that work for you to deal with your grief.
- Avoid focusing on what could have been or what you might have done.

On July 27, 2015, Tony Rose lost his son. His daughter, Kate, lost her older brother.

Johnny Rose was just 28 years old when he experienced what's commonly called a “widow- maker” heart attack, which killed him instantly. But at the time of his death, it was far from certain that a natural cause was the culprit. After excelling at school early in life, Johnny had spent several years struggling. By 2015, although he was an attorney, he was unemployed, depressed and living in his father's pool house. His relationship with his family had reached a crossroads.

As Tony and Kate grieved over time, together and separately, they came to some important conclusions about life and death. About the process of working through a tragedy. And about how to grieve for the past while also living in the moment and for the future.

To help others, they decided to share their insights with the world. In 2018, they published **Beautiful Grief: A Father and Daughter's Brutally Honest Walk with Death**, which became an international bestseller.

Let's face it: we will all deal with tremendous pain and grief at some point in our lives — either directly, or when someone close to us experiences life-shattering pain. These ten lessons from the Roses can potentially help all of us when those challenging times occur.

Lesson #1: Understand the limbo you experience

When life drops us to our knees, we believe the apocalypse has hit. But it has not. Instead, we have moved into what is called the liminal space — a place of transition and limbo. We have left one phase and one set of rituals or traditions, but have not yet established new rituals.

During this liminal stage, you know that things will never be the same and there is no new normal. It can feel both permanent and overwhelming. At this moment, it's important to recognize that you can come out of it, and that you can eventually see a future of happiness and joy. Your pain does not need to shackle you. Tell yourself this fact, even if you can't fully believe it or appreciate it in the moment.

Lesson #2: Don't block or deny grief

When you are thrown into the liminal space (where you might be for minutes, hours or days), you will feel as though the world should stop. But it continues, even for you. You may feel unable to cope, as though you are lacking the tools necessary for survival in this suddenly strange world.

This is normal. When the floor drops out from under you, you are supposed to feel shock. You are in a foreign land. Allow yourself to be there for now.

Lesson #3: Make your own meaning

The most that you will ever know of a person is about 10 or 15 percent. When they die, you will learn about sides of them you never knew existed. You will discover all sorts of new information that confirms your dead brother, your dead spouse, your dead friend or your dead child, had dimensions to their personality that you never knew existed — dimensions you will wish you had known about before.

You cannot hold all the pieces of a person in one place. They will spill out. Just when you think you have captured a person, you will notice something on the other side of the room that does not fit.

Human beings are mysterious and open to interpretation. They shift, grow and break. They say things they don't mean, and they don't say things they wish they had. Sometimes they hide; sometimes they put on a brave face. Those of us on the receiving end never really know for sure what is real, what is amplified and what is hidden. Some questions will remain unanswered, so the best we can do is to attach our own meaning to them. Absent answers to our questions, we have to interpret the past in the way that best allows us to live powerfully and joyfully.

Lesson #4: Embrace “moment stacking”

There is an alternative to viewing your future in the context of the death of a loved one. The memories of that person will never go away. But if every future moment is considered in the context of that loss, the true joy that can come from a wonderful moment or event will couple to that loss. Instead, look at moments and events of warmth, love and joy as apart from your loved one's death.

The Roses call this “moment stacking” — allowing the accumulation of new moments that exist without our deceased loved ones. When you can see a future that is not tied to the loss, you have come to the beginning of your new normal. Our old moments still exist, but new stacks of moments have accumulated beside them.

Important: visualize these moment stacks as separate entities. The stack of moments that included your deceased loved one is complete. It will never be erased, but it will not add new layers. Do not allow the moments that you had in the past to jump into the moments you have now.

Lesson #5: Acknowledge the surreal awkwardness of grief

We all get dropped to our knees at some point by something unexpected. It is part of the human condition. Your brother dies. You lose your job. Your husband cheats on you. This is life. Commit to taking this life that no longer makes sense and moving to a new place so that life makes sense again. Until you get there, it's going to feel awkward and surreal. Let it.

Lesson #6: View the deceased through an honest lens

People who have lost a loved one often struggle to find a balance between deifying the person and hiding that person away.

There are those who feel so much regret that they take down every picture, refuse to speak of their deceased loved one, and create rigid rules about what can and cannot be discussed. As a result, they never have an honest, realistic discussion of who that person was — and what lessons could be taken from his or her life.

Others worship their deceased loved ones, creating shrines to their memory. This edification can take up so much mental space that they have no room left to be inspired by others. They are stuck in a moment.

A person can be both a hero and a failure, and balance comes when you see that coexistence. You need not romanticize a person so much that no one else is worthy, nor must you live in constant regret. Instead, you can take the lessons from the person's life and move forward toward a future informed (but not shackled) by the teachings of your past.

Important: the flaws and imperfections of a person pale in comparison to the lessons we can learn from the best of him or her. One of the best ways to grow is to take the best of your loved one. Remember who they were when they were shining, then go out and be that person in the world.

Lesson #7: Don't get hung up on what could have been

Your loved one is gone, and though you would do anything to see him or her again, in this life, you will not. This might sound harsh, but it drives the point home: there is no easy way to “get over” the death of someone you love.

Too often, people in grief ruminate on what life would have been like if the death or other grief-sparking event hadn't happened. Such rumination is a fruitless cycle that will take you to the same tragic ending each and every time.

Worse off are those of us who believe we are somehow responsible for or somehow could have prevented that death. Maybe that is true — but most times it is not. This is the little liar sitting on your shoulder that blocks your future joy and happiness. Move on, knowing you did the best you could at the time.

When you are asked, “How are you getting over it?” feel free to reply that you might never get over it. Grief will be with you, but it doesn't have to be your focus.

Lesson #8: It's your grief — so use the tools that work for you

If you take stock of the people you know who have lost loved ones, you'll see that most people deal with grief in one of three ways: with matter-of-fact reason, religion or spirituality. Use whatever moves you through that liminal space faster. Can you use religion, spirituality or reason to reach happiness and get better? Then use it!

Look for ways to be happy, even if other people think you are doing it wrong. What works for you might not work for other people dealing with their grief. But if it gives you a sliver of hope, stop worrying about what other people say you should do to grieve “the right way.”

Lesson #9: Post-grief life doesn't need to be a lesser life

Different is not the same as less. Your life is different after grief — and the differences might feel staggering. Yet they don't need to be differences of a lesser quality. While Tony admits he has more sadness than he had before Johnny died, he also notes his joy is deeper. He notices moments that he would not have noticed before and that his feelings are purer and more accessible.

The upshot: the new memories he has made since his son's death are not of lesser quality. Avoid the trap of believing that “different” and “less” are synonymous, or you won't see the joy and the beauty that remain.

Lesson #10: There is beauty in grief

The beauty of grief is that it stretches your emotional bandwidth. The extent to which you can feel joy, happiness, love and compassion is directly proportional to the amount of pain, grief, sadness and devastation you have felt. While there is no beating grief, you can leverage grief so that it increases your joy. When you do this, you see that your grief is beautiful. Embrace it.



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Falkenberg-Poetz & Pidhirniak Wealth

Eric Falkenberg-Poetz B.Comm, CIM®, FCSI®

Wealth Advisor, Investment Advisor

Eric.Falkenberg-Poetz@RichardsonWealth.com

Michael Pidhirniak CFP®, CIM®

Wealth Advisor, Investment Advisor

Michael.Pidhirniak@RichardsonWealth.com

Anne Marie Jess BA (Hons), CIM®

Associate Investment Advisor

Anne-Marie.Jess@RichardsonWealth.com

Mikayla Penner BBA

Associate

Mikayla.Penner@RichardsonWealth.com

Carly Kalynchuk B.Comm

Assistant

Carly.Kalynchuk@RichardsonWealth.com

www.FPPW.ca



To setup an appointment, please contact Carly Kalynchuk at Carly.Kalynchuk@RichardsonWealth.com or toll-free at 1.866.205.3550 or locally at 780.409.7764.

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