

Our Outlook Matters

By Judy Tatelbaum

Two Pages



How we face the challenge of the death of a loved one impacts both our healing process and our future. Our attitude can serve as either a powerful inhibitor or healer. When we view our sorrows in a negative way, they feel more like ordeals, and ordeals usually seem beyond our capabilities. However, if we can muster some kind of positive words and actions for ourselves, we will handle our situation more easily.

Up to now, we may not have thought about how our attitude helps or limits our healing. Following are some examples of ways we cope:

Victim. We cannot help feeling like a victim, at least momentarily, after the loss of a loved one. Painful events seem to zap our sense of confidence or power. We ask, “why me”? We look around at intact relationships, intact families, and we feel cheated. But, prolonging this feeling of being a victim of life’s circumstances renders us powerless.

I can’t. We may feel we haven’t the skills to recover from this loss, or that it’s too hard—or even impossible—to overcome our pain and sorrow. That isn’t necessarily true. Holding on to the idea “I can’t” immobilizes us.

It’s not worth it. Sometimes we imagine life will never be good again because our loved one is gone. How do we know? Since we can never predict the future, why not imagine our unknown future life as satisfying?

It will take forever. If we have no experience in healing from painful events, any time involved in doing so will seem long. We want instant and painless recovery. Taking time, be it weeks or months, is essential for our healing. Nothing lasts forever, not even pain.

I can’t do it alone and there’s no one to help me. Help is just around the corner if we look for it—whether it is a group, a therapist, clergy or friend. Others can support us to face our feelings, to voice our pain, and to begin to recreate our lives after a loss. People grieving often feel separate from those who are not in pain. Through other’s support, new doors will open.

I can’t live without this person. At first it’s unimaginable that we can live a life without him or her. In time, we can learn to live life looking forward to the future without erasing the past. We will survive. Others have and so will we.

Continued on back

Here are some positive views that could replace those negative ideas:

I can. As difficult as it may be to imagine, just saying these simple words can alter our ability to cope with difficult times. With these words, we turn on a guiding light for ourselves, altering our belief in our abilities to cope. ***I will.*** This is like making a promise to heal ourselves, a powerful promise that we can fulfill. These words can be the first steps to our facing, feeling, and recovering from loss.

I'll learn how. Whenever we are willing to be a student or beginner and learn new skills, we open ourselves to more possibility and hope. We give ourselves a chance to expand in unexpected ways. We are never too old to learn something new. ***I'll get help.*** Admitting we may need outside intervention can be a crucial step toward healing ourselves. In tough circumstances, we need help. It may take searching for just the right counselor, therapist, group, books, or people, but we can find what we need.



I'll show them. This feisty and positive view brings out the fighter in us, and supports us to stand and face loss or tragedy. ***I will make my life a tribute to...*** This is a very beautiful way to take on the challenge of facing the loss of a loved one. This makes the death have added meaning, and will enhance life for ourselves and others.

I recently spent an evening with a hospice support group of people who'd suffered a loss a year or so earlier. They wisely called their group "Moving Forward" to inspire their recovery from their losses and their recommittal to living satisfying lives. A positive outlook like the idea of moving forward is a key step to healing from loss.

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