

# HEALTHY HEALING

We live our entire lives knowing at some point we will lose our parents. In the natural order of things, children outlive their parents. We can live decades with this knowledge and still be devastated when loss occurs. This article provides some healthy and helpful exercises for ways to heal from losing a parent.

**Healthy healing equals faith plus work plus time, the formula for healing.**

Healthy healing is not about pushing your emotional pain down, trying not to think about your missing parent, or pretending everything is okay when it certainly is not. Losing a parent shakes your sense of self to your core, and anything that touches or potentially threatens your core needs your attention.



Your **faith** is a critical element in grieving because you are going to need something bigger than you are to hold onto. When the ground beneath your feet rumbles and shakes you reach for something sturdy to steady yourself. Faith in God, faith in your surviving family, faith in the process; losing a parent will require you to trust in what your eyes just cannot see. Allow your faith to support you in your loss by praying, talking with a trusted friend who shares your same beliefs, and searching for answers to the deeper existential questions of meaning and purpose we find rising to the surface.

The **work** of grieving the loss of a parent involves choices that may feel counterintuitive to you. Your heart will tell you this cannot be true. They cannot be gone. They will come walking through the door any minute now. The work of grieving is to gently and lovingly remind yourself that what has happened is real. Acceptance of what is real does not mean you have to like it. It just means we have to recognize and acknowledge it. Your mind will tell you that you will heal faster if you turn off the tear ducts and refuse to allow yourself to cry. Just ignore those painful emotions and it will not hurt so much. The work of grieving is allowing yourself space in your life to feel your feelings. Healthy healing involves the release and expression of emotional pain. Well meaning friends will tell you it is time to dive back into responsibility and distract yourself by getting back to work. The work of grieving is carving out time after your loss to talk about, reflect on, consider carefully, treasure deeply, appreciate gratefully, and resolve thoughtfully the meaning of your parent's life coming to an end.

Questions grieving people ask seems to always include, "*How long will I feel this way? Will I ever feel normal again?*" Healthy healing takes **time**. Time does not heal anything but is a necessary space where healing can take place. If you will step into your faith, do the work of grieving, and allow yourself the time to make the journey, you will heal.



You will come to a place where the pain is not as intense, and having realized your normal has changed, you will begin to adjust to it. Your traumatic images of loss will gradually shift to positive memories of your favorite times together and the grateful appreciation for all your parent meant to you. You will recognize the consequences of your loss, and you will choose to go on living and loving. At times you will feel sad, your eyes will fill with tears, and you will

wish they were here again to help you, listen to you, or just to witness a moment in your life. In that moment you will resolve to be a better, stronger, happier, and healthier you.

