

Sample: *New York Teacher*, Social Services Column

Grief Does Not Walk A Straight Line

Q. I lost my husband a few months ago, and feel like I am loosing my grip. Sometimes, I am suddenly hit by strong emotions like incredible sadness in one moment and intense anger in the next. When will I get my life back on track?

The painful emotions and sudden mood changes you describe are a normal part of grieving. Loss is one of life's most stressful events. Denial, shock, sadness, anger, depression, anxiety, and guilt are just some of the common emotions that may arise. The intensity, duration, and sheer range of feelings can make anyone feel out of control, but all these emotions are a healthy, appropriate, and natural expression of your loss. Physical symptoms like fatigue, disturbed sleep, and diminished appetite are also not unusual.

Grief is an ongoing process, not a short-lived event. Sometimes there is an initial sensation of shock, disbelief, or numbness. This is typically followed by a longer phase of suffering that allows us to gradually heal as we integrate the loss over time. Then, in the final stage of recovery, we come to accept our loss and are able to fully return to a normal life, albeit changed.

However, grief does not necessarily follow a straight line. Upsetting emotions may arise in any sequence, at any time. In fact, everyone experiences and expresses grief differently.

Allowing yourself the time to grieve is crucial to your well being. Here are some ways to move through your pain.

- Be patient, it can take months or years to come to terms with a major loss.
- Express your feelings and stay connected to your family and friends.
- Take care of yourself by eating well, resting, having regular medical check-ups, and putting off any major life changes.
- Avoid the overuse of alcohol or medication.
- Ask for professional help if your grief is too difficult to bear.

“The staff of NYSUT Social Services is here to help you during this difficult time,” says Scott Hicks, a social worker from the department. “We will listen closely to your situation and, if you would like, guide you to bereavement services wherever you live.”

Remember you are not alone. We all experience grief. In time, the pain of loss will subside, supplanted by your most treasured memories.

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