



## Coping with Loss and Grief

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**W**e all experience some form of loss or change in our lives. Loss triggers transitions requiring us to redefine and recreate, bridging our past to the present. Loss can be the result of the death of a loved one, a change in health, marital or job status, parenting a special needs child, moving or experiencing an empty nest.

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, "Grief is the normal response of sorrow, emotion, and confusion that comes from losing someone or something important to you. It is a natural part of life." Unprocessed grief can lead to medical problems like chronic illness. Grieving is necessary for healing that will differ in every individual. Life is going to be different; however, it can be joyful and prosperous when we can grieve the "old life" and embrace the "new life." Pain is one of our best instructors giving birth to new life which brings new purpose, meaning and hope.

As a parent of a special needs child, I have expressed our journey through an analogy I once heard of planning a trip to Italy. I've spent long hours planning and investing in the culture to really experience this journey. I've bought the right guide books and have learned the language. However, during my flight there's been a slight detour. The flight attendant says "Welcome to Holland." Wait, I didn't plan for Holland; now the guide books have changed and the language is different. This is very foreign to me. Breathe. It's not a horrible place just a different place. If I can redefine and recreate, I can enjoy the beautiful tulips and windmills; the very lovely things Holland has to offer.



### How do we redefine life and recreate self?

**First**, be kind to yourself; give yourself permission to grieve. Studies show the most important thing during a time of loss is self-care; self compassion. How do you relax? What do you enjoy? Take time to breathe and enjoy life. Maybe you need to redefine or modify an outdoor activity due to an injury or illness. Embrace the new.

**Secondly**, at the end of each day, rewind and reflect. Journal in a gratitude journal about blessings in your day; gratitude anchors us to the present. Your perspective will start to change, the pain will lessen and you will start to see "God Winks" throughout your day.

**Thirdly**, find support. We were created with a relational



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identity; when we are in pain, we crave connectedness. Seek out caring people. You can join Mammoth Hospital's grief support group; you are not alone. Valuable information and resources are shared among participants. Studies show when those in pain can help others in the same situation, it gives them a sense of purpose.

**Lastly**, research indicates religious and spiritual beliefs are an important factor and predictor of outcomes during a time of grieving. Those with strong spiritual beliefs recover quicker because they can release the pain and brokenness to a greater strength that brings a sense of peace, hope and healing.

It's important for those grieving to not drop out of life. Is it time to redefine and recreate? Enjoy the journey by embracing the new. Savor the present.

*If you would like more information on Mammoth Hospital's grief support group, call facilitator Lori Ciccarelli Stotko, MPS, at 760-924-4015. We will accompany you on your journey; you are not alone. After six months – one year, if you are experiencing impaired ability to function, seek out professional support from a counselor as you are possibly experiencing prolonged grief.*

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