

# HOPE

## Support Through Grief & Loss

*This information is provided courtesy of Hamilton's Academy of Grief & Loss:  
Information, Resources, Education & Support.*

### The Six Central Needs of Mourning

*By Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD.*

**Mourning** - A shared social response to loss. It implies ACTIVITY...an explicit need to DO or EXPERIENCE one's grief. As a "companion" to someone who is grieving, it is helpful to understand these six central needs of mourning. In order for someone to progress through his or her grief, these needs must be worked on -- perhaps repeatedly -- throughout the grief journey.

#### 1. Acknowledge the Reality of the Loss

*As a companion to the bereaved:*

- What is the mourner teaching me about where she is in the process of acknowledging the reality of this loss?
- Is time a factor in where the mourner is in relation to this need?
- Is the mourner self-treating the pain of the reality of the loss in self-destructive patterns of behavior?
- What can I, as a companion, do or be for this person to create a "safe place" to work on this need?

#### 2. Experience the Pain of Grief

*As a companion to the bereaved:*

- Does the person understand the role of pain & suffering in integrating loss into life?
- Does the person demonstrate self-compassion & patience in "dosing" herself with the pain of the loss?
- What can I, as a companion, do or be for this person to create a "safe place" to work on this need?

#### 3. Remember the Person Who Died

*As a companion to the bereaved:*

- Where is the person in shifting the relationship from one of presence to one of memory?
- Has this person had experience with being told to "let go" of the past? If so, how has this influenced their grief experience?
- In what ways does this person give honor to a relationship memory?
- Is the person resisting any shift in the relationship and trying to maintain the relationship as one of presence?
- What can I, as a companion, do or be for this person to create a "safe place" to work on this need?



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#### 4. Develop a New Self-Identity

*As a companion to the bereaved:*

- Where is the mourner in the evolution of a new self-identity?
- What are the role changes this person is experiencing as a result of this loss?
- Are role models - others who have gone through similar experiences - available to the mourner?
- What can I, as a companion, do or be for this person to create a “safe place” to work on this need?

#### 5. Search for Meaning

*As a companion to the bereaved:*

- Where is this person in the process of renewing resources for life and living?
- What were this person’s religious, spiritual and philosophical beliefs about life and death prior to loss?
- Has the loss altered those beliefs? If so, how?
- Does the mourner give himself permission to explore previously held beliefs or world views?
- What can I, as a companion, do or be for this person to create a “safe place” to work on this need?

#### 6. Receive Ongoing Support from Others

*As a companion to the bereaved:*

- Does the person have ongoing support available? If so, from whom?
- Does the person feel abandoned by any person or group that he hoped to receive support from?
- Are there any stigmatized circumstances surrounding the loss that put the mourner at risk for not receiving support?
- Are there any specific days or times of the year where the person would benefit from additional support?
- What can I, as a companion, do or be for this person to create a “safe place” to work on this need?



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