

Maintaining Your Connection and Making Meaning

In the early months of grief after someone has died, you may find yourself in a new unimaginable reality, where you are confronted daily with the enormous tasks of grief—accepting the reality of the loss, processing the pain of grief, and making the adjustments that are needed in life. As you continue to navigate your grief, you may find ways that you stay connected with your person, invest in your own life in a new way and create meaning for yourself. Maintaining a connection to your person who died and making meaning do not cancel out the pain of grief, nor do they “cure” it. Instead, making meaning and maintaining your connection can happen as part of your grief process, alongside the pain.

The ways that you maintain your connection and create meaning in your life are highly personal—as individual and specific as the love you shared with your person and as unique as you are. There is no prescribed way to navigate this, but examples of ways that others have found connection and meaning during their grieving process might be helpful to learn about.

Here are a few ways:

- * Carry on the legacy of the person who died by getting involved in a cause that was important to them. For example, volunteer for or donate to a relevant cause.
- * Stay connected to your person by enjoying the things that they did—prepare food that they would have made for gatherings, listen to their favorite musicians, travel, etc.
- * Honor the ways that you have been influenced by your person or changed by your grief and invest in a new part of life. Perhaps you had been considering changing careers and you can feel your person in your heart, cheering you on and you decide to take the leap.
- * If your person lived with a particular challenge, a health or mental health issue, for example, you might connect with an organization that helps people with similar challenges in their lives and find out about how you can help.
- * On their birthday or other special days, gather with others in their honor.
- * Write to your person, talk to them, and/or imagine their responses to you.
- * Do something special with their belongings—donate them, wear them, give them away to others who would appreciate their meaning, make a blanket or quilt from them, etc.
- * Engage in cultural practices that are meaningful to you and/or your person who died.

Some questions to ask yourself as you consider how to maintain your connection to your person and create meaning in your life after their death:

- * What was meaningful to me before my person died? What is meaningful now?
- * What are my person’s values? Their qualities that make them unique?
- * What did my person and I enjoy doing together?
- * What influence did my person have on my life? What influence did I have on theirs?

Grief isn’t linear and there is no one right way to navigate through the tasks of grieving. If you find that your focus is on processing the pain of grief or making life adjustments, and not on maintaining the connection or making meaning, that’s okay. This is a personal process and only you can decide what this will look like for you. It cannot be forced by you or anyone else. Be patient and gentle with yourself and invite others in your life to do the same.

Based on Worden, J. W. (2018). *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*, Fifth Edition, Springer, NY. and Kessler, D. (2019) *Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief*. Scribner, NY.