

Write to Heal

A traumatic experience, such as the break-up of a meaningful relationship or the death of a loved one, creates major changes in our lives and affects every area of our existence including how we interact with others. The way that we choose to express our grief is personal and often based on how we relate to life on a daily basis. Reactions can range from wanting to be left alone to wanting someone nearby at all times. Some people may cry or display their grief openly, others may consider grieving to be strictly a private matter and still others may deny their feelings altogether.

Allowing ourselves (or others) to experience grief without expectations or time limits is important. Pretending that something didn't happen or that we're not affected by it is not an option. Denial is a red flag that needs to be attended to immediately. It's not something that will go away on its own. A person that's living in denial may give the appearance that they've dealt with the crisis and are moving forward nicely. However, if they're having difficulty controlling their emotions or are indulging in behavior that's contrary to what they would normally do (e.g. impulsive buying, gambling, etc) denial may be a factor worth considering.

So how do we express our emotions in an effort to avoid denial? A method that worked for me when we experienced the loss of several family members in a relatively short span of time was writing in a journal. Writing allowed me to express my feelings without having to explain or justify them at a time of my own choosing and in the privacy of my own home. It's a method that I highly recommend not only because it worked for me, but because others have used it with equally great success. No special tools are required. A spiral notebook and a pen will serve the purpose. Below are a few tips to help you get started.

- Select a time of day and place that allows you to write uninterrupted.
- Write daily for at least 15 minutes.
- Use pen and paper (versus a keyboard).
- Express your feelings without censoring.
- Store your journal in a private place.
- Use a different journal for different topics or situations

Using a journal to express our feelings has many benefits including some unexpected ones. It led me to write two books on grief recovery and eventually to start a series of workshops designed to help people recover from traumatic loss and move forward with renewed hope. Venting your feeling in a journal is a good way to express yourself without worrying what someone else might think.