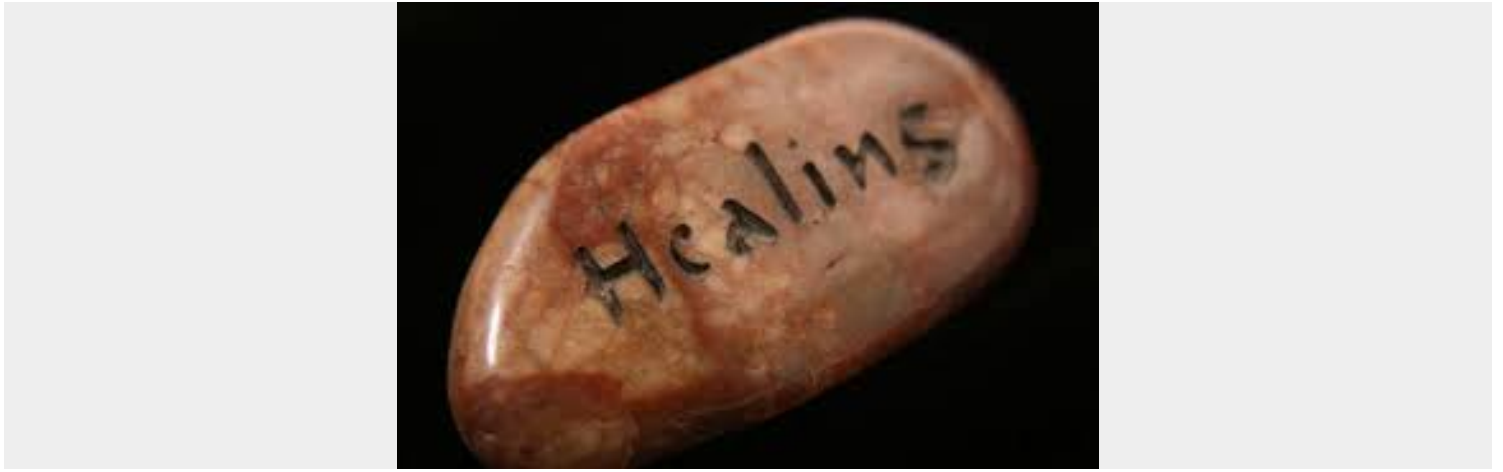


# SECONDARY LOSSES

*Posted on May 31, 2018 by Jennifer Stern, LISW*



**Category:** [My Articles & Thoughts](#)

**Tag:** [coping](#), [grief](#), [growth](#), [healing](#), [resiliency](#), [self-awareness](#), [self-care](#), [self-compassion](#)



When we think about grief we frequently focus on death itself. Grief is compounded by secondary losses that we often neglect to give credence to. The loss of hopes and dreams. The loss of plans. The loss of routine. The loss of identity (spouse, parent, sister, son...). The loss of the roles that our loved one served in our lives (and we in theirs). Learning to accept and adapt to the loss of those roles (provider, cheerleader, sounding board, cook, copilot, homemaker, social connector, financial advisor, lover...) can be painful and quite challenging. The adaptations you will have to make, the skills you may need to develop, the help you may need to ask for and accept are all part of adjusting to and learning to live beyond loss. Adjusting to this new normal takes patience, self-compassion and self care. There will be good days and there will be bad days. Some days you will feel competent and strong and then out of nowhere you will be brought to your knees by a grief attack. Grief attacks come and go, they are normal, and are not to be feared. Feel your feelings and when ready pick yourself up, dust yourself off, reset, and keep moving forward one step at a time. You will be okay. You will learn that you are more resilient than you ever imagined possible.

When someone we love dies we tend to memorialize them as flawless, the relationship as perfect. Try to remember that to be human is to be flawed and perfection does not exist. It is important to grieve the actual person as they were (flaws and all). This allows us to grieve more fully, more honestly, and without the confusion between how we are remembering them and who they actually were (the good, the bad, and everything in between...they were human after all).

We do not get over loss nor does grief lessen over time but our capacity to live forward with grief becomes greater. We learn that grief is survivable. It doesn't necessarily get easier but it does become different and more manageable. We adjust. We reorient. We grow and we heal.

Practice accepting *what is* without comparing to *what was*. Gather moments of confidence, pride, contentment and love. Begin to recreate purpose, routine, connection and meaning for yourself as your life is *now*. Give yourself permission to discover (and accept) who YOU are now. This truly is a deliberate practice of living beyond your comfort zone (until it isn't).

There is no one way or right way to grieve. If your approach to coping is working keep doing it. It is not reasonable to equate *working* with the absence of sorrow or pain. Effective coping provides a positive distraction, a buffer, some relief in the most subtle of ways.

- Journaling
- Exercise
- Meditation/guided imagery
- Healthy activities such as reading, puzzles, knitting, working with tools, yard work, movies, music, dance, painting, scrapbooking, cooking, word searches, joining a golf league, etc.
- Therapy
- Support groups
- Going to work

- Volunteering
- Taking naps
- Taking classes or attending lectures

Be flexible knowing that what works today may not work tomorrow. Healing is experiential and happens over time. It is not linear. Just as everybody's loss is different so too is their grief *and* their healing. The goal is to learn to live life meaningfully without your loved one here while still remembering and honoring them.

Managing expectations is integral. Grieving the loss of someone you love is hard. It can be depleting, unnerving and intense. Give yourself permission to be human. To have good days and bad. To struggle and to rise again. One day at a time.

## Comments



**Jennifer Stern, LISW** - 2018-06-03 21:45:53

Redefining yourself takes so much courage and faith. Good for you for joining a meet up group. Making new friends and having new experiencing can be quite life affirming. Your loved ones are forever in your heart and you are finding ways to live meaningfully here and now. So powerful.



**Heidi Widmar** - 2018-06-03 16:56:06

This blog seems to have been written for me. The feeling of shattered hopes, dreams and plans has been horrible. Everyday I think about the what ifs that will not happen, but slowly I am starting to redefine myself and what life is now. Yes, the grief attacks come and they go. They come unexpectedly and some attacks have triggers which I am becoming aware of. What I can see is they are necessary for a redefinition of self. The process has been hard...very hard. Heartache is like no other. Four years ago, I had a heart attack and when I compare the pain of a heart attack with the pain of heartache, there is no comparison. The heartache is much worse and there is no medication that takes that kind of pain away except for time and the will to go forward and make life meaningful again. I know the loved ones that I have lost this past year would want me to continue living life and enjoying. With that in mind and a little encouragement, one of the things I have done has been to step outside of my comfort zone (whatever that is these days as comfort has been shattered too) and joined a Meet Up group. To my surprise, everyone has been very welcoming and I am making a few new friends. I find that I am looking forward to the various activities that I sign up for. It is putting hope back into my life slowly. I feel the dreams and plans starting to form again but differently. I also believe that I will never get over the losses, but I don't want to either as they are who I am today and who I am going to be tomorrow. I look forward to one day joining my loved ones in spirit, but for now, as the blog states, my goal is to live life meaningfully without my loved ones here but still remembering and honoring them. They are still with me forever in my heart.