

# Stillness versus Staying Busy

Dr. Karen S. Scott



Have you found that many people in your life are trying to “keep you busy” with invitations to lunch or events? Do you find yourself dreading the thought of answering the phone to have another conversation? Or, do you find yourself trying to keep yourself busy to avoid feeling the pain of loss?

The truth is that grief is a solitary experience that requires times of stillness and inner reflection. You have to spend time alone with your sadness to process your feelings of loss. Staying busy only delays this process and may actually make the process more difficult if you try to work through your grief many months after the death, when everyone else has moved on and doesn't understand your sadness. Sharing memories with others and sharing feelings of sadness is definitely helpful, but so much of grief work has to be done individually. Grieving requires figuring out the totality of what is missing from your life as a result of the death, as well as how to accommodate all those missing pieces. This can't be done quickly, nor can someone else do it for you.

Many newly bereaved individuals stay frenetically busy in an attempt to avoid being overwhelmed by tears. “I'm afraid if I start crying, I'll never be able to stop,” is a common fear. In fact, tears are a necessary release. The longer you push them back, the less control you will have once the tears start to flow, but there will be an end to the tears. Over time, the “grief bursts” come less frequently and with less intensity.

Spending time alone in reflection may be a new and/or uncomfortable experience for you. Going through photos of happier times or looking at mementos of happier times can assist you in becoming more comfortable with this process. Writing your thoughts down in a journal can also assist in the working-through process. If you journal, you can look back at entries from earlier times and see the progress you have made.

You will often find a disconnect between what others think you should be doing and how you feel. Learn to trust your inner feeling and don't feel obligated to meet the expectations of others. Give yourself permission to decline invitations for events or conversations if you feel you just don't have the energy. Grief is emotionally exhausting, so it is perfectly reasonable that you may not have the energy to “put on a good face” or gear up for social occasions. You may also find that at the time you accepted an invitation it seemed like a good idea, only to realize that when the time comes to attend, you just don't feel like you can. Cancelling, even at the last moment, is acceptable. You may want to start giving yourself that “out” when you accept, letting others know that you may not have the energy when the time comes.

A final word of caution: Total isolation is very unhealthy. You do need the comfort of others and at times you need the distraction of thinking about something other than your loss. As in all things with grieving, there is a balance. You may have to force yourself to get out occasionally, just to help pave the way back. You will slowly find that these times help rather than drain you. Again, learn to listen to and trust your inner feelings to find your way.

Lost & Found Grief Center ©2020