

SURVIVING LONELINESS

Loneliness is a feeling, and at times it may be very intense and painful. Facing our loneliness is perhaps one of the most difficult issues following loss. It is very important that we deal with our feelings of loneliness for it is in loneliness that we discover who we are as individuals.

Loneliness is a feeling of emptiness in our deepest self; the feeling that no one cares about me or my feelings; the not having a special person to share my thoughts and experiences with; the not having the human contact – someone holding me close; not feeling safe and secure. On the negative side it is a sense of loss of control. The range of feelings that loneliness can surface in us is extensive: pain, fear, lack of companionship, anger, isolation, despair, hopelessness, loss of identity and self worth, no purpose, no one understands or cares, sinking – sick feeling, anguish. Other common behaviors which block the feeling of loneliness include: alcohol or drug abuse, promiscuous behavior, excessive work or being busy all the time.

Our willingness to face our loneliness is crucial in bereavement. There are a number of positive steps we can take to deal with our loneliness:

1. Try to identify the times when you feel lonely (nights, holidays, meal times, @ church, when you are with other couples, etc)
2. At these times try to identify the feeling – recognize your loneliness for what it is and don't mistake it for something else.
3. Accept the feelings within yourself.
4. Share your feelings with a close friend, support group, relative or minister.
5. Be open to accepting help from others who care. There are those who wish to support us, but if we do not let them into our life there isn't anything they can do.
6. Journal, do something physical, listen to tapes, keep busy, get outdoors, do crafts, write poetry, pray / recite verses, meditate, call someone to talk, take a class, play cards, read, go for a drive, visit the cemetery, work, go out to eat.
7. Recognize these feelings as the emotions of grief and that they are normal grief reactions.

8. Healing will happen, but it is a process, which requires work – it is not an overnight event.