



GRIEF AND GUILT

When we hear the news of a death we experience many emotions to include guilt at times. As survivors we are often profoundly affected by tragic, unexpected, or accidental death. The question of why may cross our mind. When the question lingers and develops into expressions such as, "Why did I live when other people died?" "It should have been me instead." These may be expressions of survivor guilt. This type of guilt is a very normal response to a traumatic event and is our way of processing and trying to make sense of why it was not me or my loved one. It is difficult for human beings to feel grateful for being alive while at the same time feeling intense sorrow for those who did not survive and/or those who are in the shock and despair of grief.

We tend to want to trade places with the person who is grieving or who has died. Yet we remain here to suffer the pain, agony, depression, flashbacks and/or nightmares. Guilt is an emotional reaction resulting from an event or behavior that is perceived as wrong. Grief is the process which we must go through to heal.

Following are some suggestions to assist in managing feelings of survivor guilt:

- Accept and acknowledge your feelings and recognize that they are perfectly normal.
- Recognizing your good fortune does not diminish your sorrow and grief over those who were lost. All of our feelings are an important part of the grieving process and should not be suppressed.
- Talk about how you feel with others. You will find you are not the only one with these feelings. Knowing this will assist you in resolving these feelings.
- Look to find meaning and purpose in the things you can do in your life. The ultimate Question(s) of "why" and "what if" are questions no one can answer.
- Keep the memory of a loved one alive and assist others who are grieving by sharing your memories of that person, participating in memorial services, donating, or continuing the efforts of a good cause.
- Do not allow feelings of guilt to keep you from responding to your own needs. Recognize the difference between mourning the losses and punishing yourself.
- Focus on things you have control over today. Channel your energy towards a productive outcome.
- Seek out and use spiritual resources.
- If feelings of grief and guilt are overwhelming talk to a professional counselor.

For more information and assistance call:

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