

Coping with a Death in the Family



Five Steps to Healing

Courtesy of
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When we go through the crisis of the loss of a family member or other Loved One, our stress levels increase significantly. Whether it was sudden or expected, whether it was the result of an accident or a progressive disease, the shock and awareness of our loss will take its toll on your emotions and mental health. If you are struggling to cope with the crisis of your loss, there are things you can do. Here, you will discover a step-by-step guide to dealing with the crisis of the loss of your Loved One.

STEP ONE: ACKNOWLEDGE THE SITUATION FOR WHAT IT IS



When you are dealing with your emotional and material loss, it is easy to let your emotions take over. Grief. Depression. “If only” thinking can interfere with your recovery and that of your family. These alongside other factors can cause destructive personal or family brooding. It is especially common to feel situations as being hopeless. This is known as *catastrophizing* and it can greatly reduce your ability to recover from the trauma of your loss. So, how exactly can you acknowledge the situation for what it is?

Don't Ignore It

While it may be tempting to bury your head in the sand, ignoring the situation isn't going to make it go away. It could be that you were emotionally dependent on the Loved One and you may be tempted to despair of being able to recover. Instead of addressing the issue, ignoring it tends to be the easiest option. Unfortunately, ignoring the death is only going to make things worse.

The same goes for your reactions to the emotional reactions of your family members. Often patience and forgiveness will allow you to continue or even restore the quality of your relationships with siblings or other family members. The crisis of your joint loss isn't going to go away simply by pretending it isn't happening. If anything, it will continue to get worse until you and your family do finally address it. So, if you have been ignoring the situation, now is the time for all of the family to stop and confront it.

Avoid Denial or Making Excuses

You may find that you stay stuck in the family crisis or because you continue to deny it has happened or make excuses. You may not recognize that this is what you are doing right away. For example, you don't feel like you are making excuses because to you, they are genuine barriers you are facing.

Write down all the reasons you are struggling to overcome the difficult situation they are in. Then, look at ways to overcome the barriers you have acknowledged. There are always ways around things and strategies you can use to overcome the reasons you are currently stuck. When you commit to making a change and avoid making excuses, you will find it much easier to deal with the crisis.

Gain Control Over Your Emotions

If there is one thing that is going to stop you from moving forward, it's not having control over your emotions. The emotions we feel can be extremely powerful; particularly the negative emotions we may feel about the death or what family members did or said after it. Therefore, if you are dealing with fear or anger, you are going to find it more difficult to handle a situation effectively.

To gain more control over your emotions, you are going to need to analyze them. What is driving the fear or anxiety? You can also start practicing **mindfulness**, such as meditation and deep breathing exercises. These will help you to calm the mind and learn how to interrupt and disrupt negative emotions.

Put The Situation Into Perspective

Another thing that's going to help, is putting the situation into perspective. When the loss of a Loved One happens, catastrophizing is a common response. At the moment, everything may seem to be hopeless or emotions of anger may be high. We may tend to focus on the worst instead of what is hopeful and positive about the future.

Catastrophizing tends to occur when the mind becomes overwhelmed by a situation. So, writing down the crisis you are going through, and your perspectives can help you to properly analyze them. Could the situation be viewed differently? Are you being

influenced by things that have happened in the past? If so, look at ways you can potentially view the situation from a more positive angle.

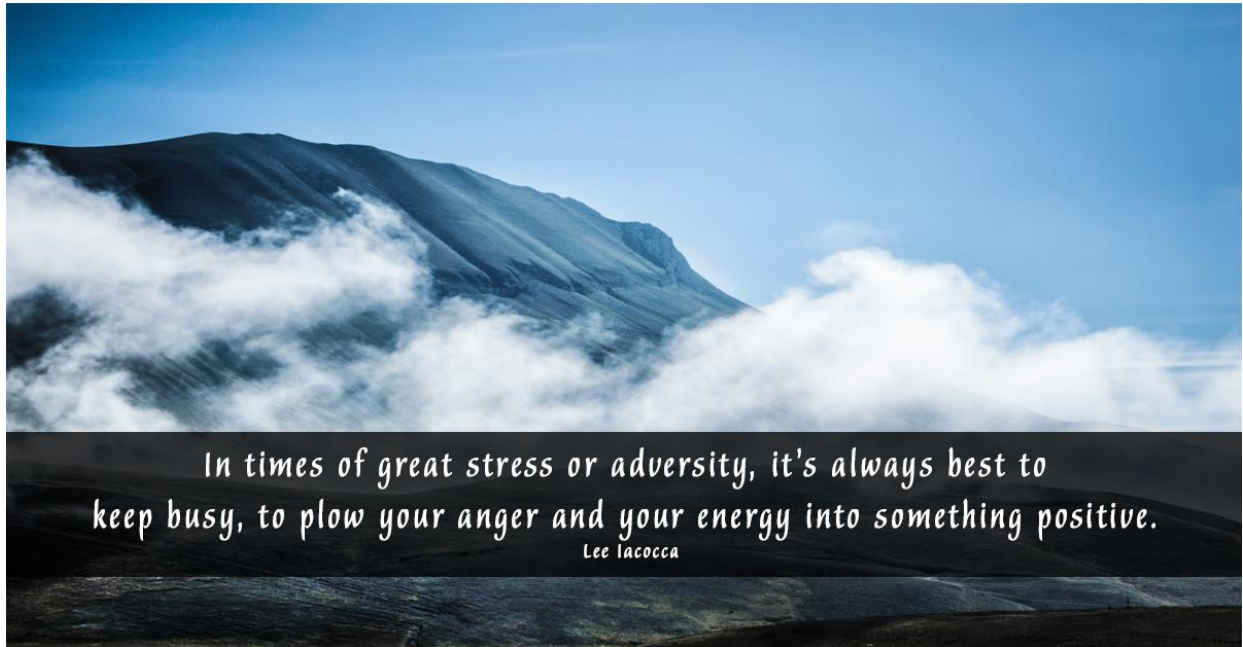
Keeping Your Thoughts Realistic

To acknowledge the family crisis, you need to keep your thoughts balanced and honest. That is, avoiding negative thoughts from taking over. We all have that inner critic and if left unchecked, it will affect our ability to deal with tough situations in a healthy manner. Like controlling your emotions, you also need to focus on controlling your thoughts. When you can recognize and counteract negative thinking, it can really help you to gain more control over how you respond.

You may find it useful to keep a **thought tracker journal**. Whenever you experience a negative thought, write it down and note what you were doing at the time. This will help you to start getting a better idea of the things that trigger your negative thinking. The more you can recognize your negative thoughts, the easier you will find it to change them.

These are some of the best ways to acknowledge the crisis of the loss you are experiencing. Once you have a good understanding of the situation, you can then move on to the next step – creating a plan to deal with it.

STEP TWO: DEVELOP A PLAN TO DEAL WITH IT



The number one thing that is going to help you to deal with a crisis of your loss, is a plan. Once you have a good understanding of the situation, you can develop a plan to help you overcome it. The big question you may have now is how can you develop a crisis plan and what type of things should you include.

Brainstorm Solutions And Analyze The Pros And Cons

To create an effective crisis plan, you should brainstorm possible solutions. Now that you can clearly see what the barriers are, it gives you the opportunity to look for ways to overcome them.

Write down all the potential solutions you can think of. For example, if you or your family has been emotionally dependent on the deceased family member, you can consider who can fill in the gap of emotional help. Get the other family members to commit ideas or resources to meet the needs. However, you can also research more about the condition, as well as look at lifestyle changes you or your family members may need to make.

Similarly, if you or your family members were financially dependent on the deceased Loved One, write down the steps you need to take to get out of the problem. This could include seeking help from an employment or debt counselor for the dependent family member. You may want to contact creditors or other professionals to tackle the dependent family member's needs. When you identify potential solutions, look at the

pros and cons of each and talk them over with other family members. The key is to find a solution that is easy to work on and that won't deliver further problems.

List The Things You Can Control

In any difficult situation, there are things that you can and cannot change. Start by making a list of the things that you can change. We can take the recent coronavirus pandemic as a good example here. You cannot control the virus itself, however, you can control your behavior to help reduce how it spreads. When you list the things you can control, you will regain more power over the situation.

Now List The Things That You Can't Control

Once you have your list of the things you can control, write another of the things you can't. This will show you what you should and shouldn't focus on. The trouble is, when you focus on the things you can't control, it is going to leave you frustrated and stressed. You will also likely give up trying to change the situation if you feel powerless by the things you can't change. Be honest about the parts of the situation you have no control over. Then, focus all your efforts on the things you can control. These are some of the best ways to create a plan for dealing with a crisis or difficult situation.

STEP THREE: SEEK HELP IF NEEDED



Part of overcoming your family's crisis is knowing when to seek help. We all need help occasionally, whether it is with our mental health or to help us understand the situation from an unbiased viewpoint.

Reaching out for help isn't always easy, but it can make a huge difference in how quickly you overcome a situation. The question is, how do you know when you need to seek professional help to get through tough times?

Top Signs To Seek Help

You may not always recognize when it is time to seek professional help with a situation. Many people prefer to try and deal with things themselves and feel like they shouldn't need any help to get through the crisis. However, not seeking help can cause you to stay in a negative situation for longer, as well as potentially lead to the situation worsening.

If you want to know when it is time to seek help, look out for the following signs:

- You are finding it hard to cope with daily life
- You feel sad, anxious, or blue most of the time
- You can't get over past hurt or trauma
- You are self-medicating
- Nothing you have tried is helping

We all feel sad, blue, and anxious during difficult times. However, if it is impacting your daily life and you feel like this often, it could be time to seek help. When you are

struggling to cope, it is going to be extremely difficult to identify the steps you need to take to get out of a tough situation. You also won't have the motivation or willpower needed to make changes.

You may also find it difficult to overcome the trauma of the loss of your Loved One or the bruised feelings from previous conflicts with your family members. The unresolved feelings you have could be negatively impacting your current situation. Past pain and trauma can cause you to react in unhealthy ways when faced with future difficulties. Therefore, overcoming any unresolved hurt is key to moving forward and dealing with the tough situation's life throws at you along the way. A licensed therapist may be able to help you or other family members address and overcome past trauma.

Do you self-medicate when faced with tough times? It could be that you turn to alcohol or drugs to help numb the pain. You may comfort eat to help you deal with trauma. Self-medicating provides temporary relief, but it is also highly dangerous. Using substances can make tough situations worse. If you find that you self-medicate, getting help can help you and your family to gain better control over the situation.

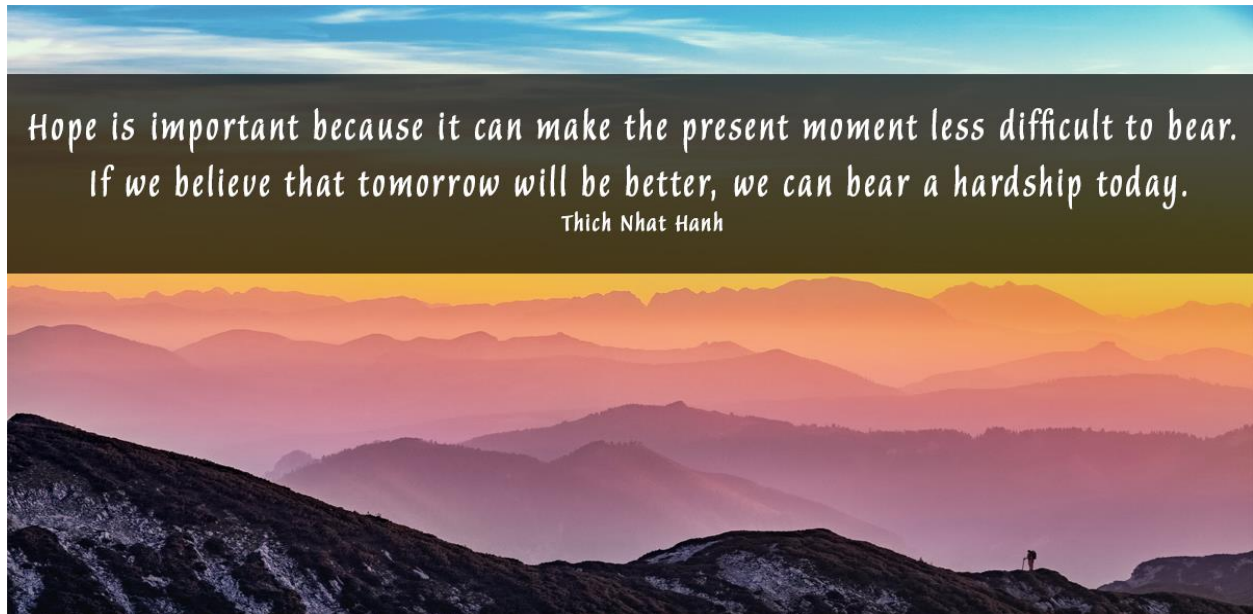
Finally, another sign you may need to seek help is if you have tried to overcome the situation, but nothing has worked. We can't always solve everything by ourselves. So, don't be afraid to admit when nothing you do is working. A qualified coach or family therapist can help you to identify new methods of dealing with a crisis. They can also help you to determine why the things you have tried haven't worked.

Where To Find The Help

If you do need to seek professional help, where exactly can you find it? For mental health-related issues, such as depression and anxiety, a licensed therapist is one way to go. You can get a referral from your doctor or look for private therapists in your local area. You can even find online therapists these days, enabling you to get the help you need from the comfort of your own home.

If you or other family members are struggling with debt as a result of the death, there are many debt relief advice services out there. They offer free advice on financial situations, helping you to get a better idea of how you can handle current debts. Often people feel so much better after they have talked to a debt advisor. Whatever tough situation you are going through, there will always be local and online services you can turn to for help.

STEP FOUR: CHANGE THE THINGS YOU CAN AND LET GO OF THE THINGS YOU CAN'T



Positive change in life generally comes when we focus on the things we can change. This means we need to let go of the things that we cannot change. Unfortunately, this is often easier said than done. Here, we will look at how you can identify the things you can change and let go of the things you can't.

What Can You Change?

In any difficult situation, there are always things you can change. The main things you can control are:

- How you react to the situation
- How you feel
- The way that you spend your time
- Your lifestyle choices
- The commitments you keep
- Whether you seek help or not

You may feel like you have no control over how you feel or react. However, there are lots of techniques you can use to develop better control over your reactions and emotions. You get to control how you feel and you can always choose to be happy. The key is figuring out how through learning different techniques.

You also get to choose how you spend your time. Everybody gets the same 24 hours in their day. How you use these hours will determine well you deal with a situation. The

more time you spend trying to work on the issues you face, the quicker you will get out of the bad situation you are in.

The lifestyle choices you or your family members make will also impact how well you deal with a situation. We already discussed earlier how substance abuse can contribute towards making a tough situation worse. Look at your lifestyle choices and see whether they could be impacting the situation. If they are, focus on changing your habits to give you better control over the circumstances you experience due to the crisis. These are just some of the things you can control in a situation. By acknowledging the things, you can change, you can then start to work on them.

How To Let Go Of Things You Cannot Change

As well as working towards the things you can change, it is also equally important to let go of the things you can't. However, this can be really challenging for some people.

If you are looking to let go of the things you cannot change in your current situation, the following things may help:

- **Journaling**
- **Mindfulness**
- **Affirmations**
- **A letting go ceremony**
- **Seek professional help**

Journaling has shown to have lots of great benefits, including helping you to let go of the things you can't change. Write down the things you can't change. Look at what you wrote and see if there are any emotions or behaviors you can identify that are stopping you from moving forward. Journaling is a great way to help you understand difficult situations and what is holding you back from overcoming them.

You can also try **mindfulness** to help you let go of things you can't change. The various mindfulness techniques are designed to clear the mind and slow down breathing. They help you to focus on the now, rather than worrying about the future or obsessing over your past. As you develop a calmer, more balanced mindset, you will start to find it much easier to let things go that you don't have any control over.

Many people find that **affirmations** can also help them to let go. There are hundreds of positive affirmations out there. Studies show that these affirmations can help to boost motivation, improve the mindset, and give you a better sense of control over a situation. Look up affirmations relating to letting go and you'll find a lot of different ones you can repeat to yourself each day.

A more unusual idea that has proven effective, is **holding a letting go ceremony**. These are particularly useful after death occurs. It could be that you write a letter to the

deceased person, then burn it to let it go. Or it could be a ceremony to acknowledge the difficulties you are facing, ending with the acceptance that you cannot change them. Look up letting go ceremonies and choose a method that might work best for you.

Finally, remember to seek help when it is needed. You won't always be able to let things go by yourself. So, recognizing when you need help to do so is important.

Look to the Future

If you listen to people who have overcome the loss of a Loved One, they often have a positive outlook. That is, they see the future of the family members and especially the children's future. It isn't always easy to identify good things in a crisis; particularly when recovering the family's lifestyle is extremely challenging. However, no matter how bad a situation is, there is usually at least one positive thing you can take away. Now let's look at how you can identify the good in a situation.

Develop A Positive Mindset

How you think will ultimately impact how you see a situation. For example, if you are depressed and anxious, your outlook will be pessimistic. If you are happy and enthusiastic, you will automatically look at things in a more positive manner.

Therefore, if you want to start looking at the good things after your loss, you're going to need to develop a positive mindset. There are lots of ways you can do this. You could **start your day with a positive intention** or focus on turning negative thoughts into positive ones.

You will find so many tips and techniques you can use online to develop a more positive mindset. There are also therapists who specialize in positive mindset techniques.

Identify Potential Lessons

Sometimes, the positive in a crisis or difficult situation, is that it teaches you something. What lessons could you learn from what is happening right now?

Challenging times always teach us a lesson. Going through difficult times is what shapes us and helps us to become better people. If you can identify the lesson in your time of crisis, it's going to help you to grow as a person. This also means that if you are faced with the same situation again, you will be in a much better position to overcome it.

Laugh A Lot

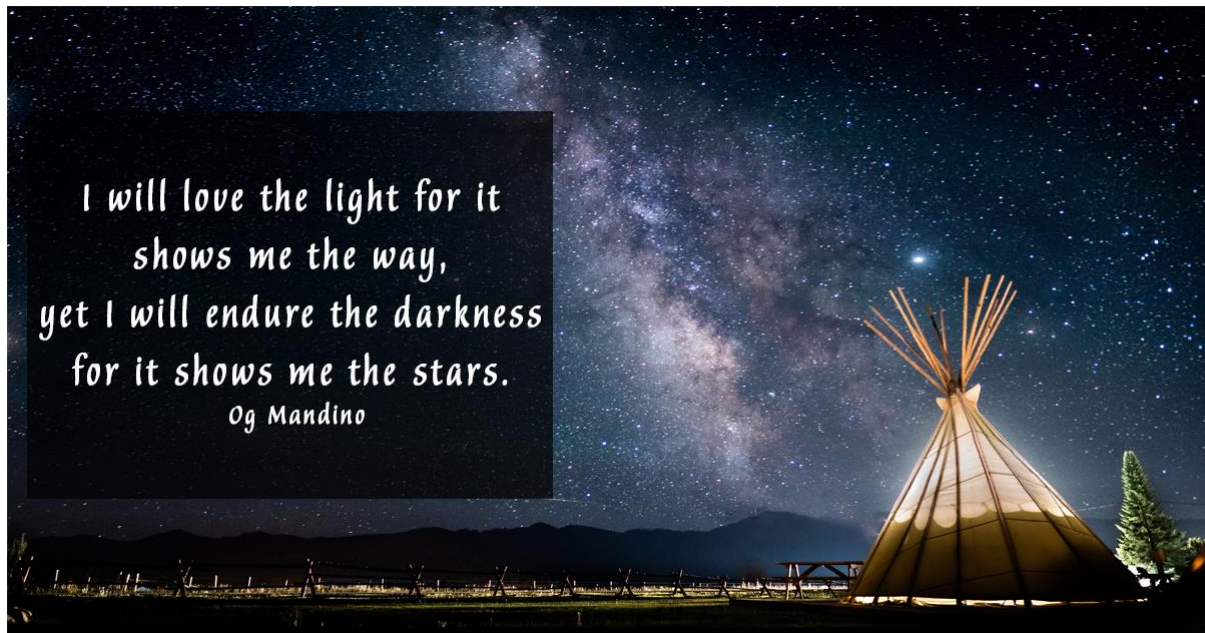
In difficult times, you aren't going to feel like laughing very often. However, did you know that laughter helps to relieve tension in the body? If you can find something to laugh at throughout your day, you are going to notice your stress levels reduce. This in turn will make you feel much stronger and better able to overcome tough times.

Practice Gratitude

Perhaps the most effective way to help you to look for the good in a situation is to **practice gratitude**. Studies have shown that writing down 3-5 things that you are grateful for each day, helps to make you happier and more positive.

As you make writing down the things you are grateful for a daily habit, it gradually rewires the brain. After a short period of time, you will notice you automatically start to find more positives throughout the day.

STEP FIVE: ACCEPT THE FINAL OUTCOME



*I will love the light for it
shows me the way,
yet I will endure the darkness
for it shows me the stars.
Og Mandino*

The final step to dealing with the crisis of your loss, is accepting that you may not be 100% happy with the outcome. Sometimes, we must simply accept a difficult situation for what it is. There won't always be a positive outcome from the things we go through in life.

The important thing here, is to learn any lessons your Loved One, as well as the loss of him or her, may have taught you. You can also do things to ensure you better accept a poor outcome. Developing coping skills to manage your feelings is a great thing you can focus on. If you can handle the negative emotions caused by a situation, they won't be able to impact you or your future progress.

You also need to remember that you are more than this one situation. Everybody suffers loss of important people in their lives. Life isn't going to be plain sailing. Just because you won't have this Loved One at your side, it doesn't mean you won't get to enjoy future success.

Take a little time out for yourself. Stepping back from the situation and taking time to recover emotionally can really help. Part of the reason people end up having to deal with trauma from their past, is because they didn't take the time to recover and heal after it happened. By taking time out now to deal with and accept the crisis of your loss, you will save yourself a lot of future pain and troubles.

Overall, dealing with your loss isn't easy. However, the steps above will hopefully help you to cope much better with the challenges that come your way. No matter what type of crisis you are dealing with, remember that it will pass.

No difficult times last forever. By following the advice above you can improve your ability to cope much better in challenging times. Don't forget to also reach out for help when you need it whether that be professional assistance or help from friends and family.

CONCLUSION

Not long ago a young man called our office for help with the probate process for his deceased mother. He said--almost apologetically--that he had to ask a lot of questions because he had never done this before. I assured him I understood because most children must handle probate matters only once and sometimes twice when their parents pass away. Our responsibility as a probate law firm is to make the process get done as fast, fair, and as worry-free as possible for the family.

The information contained in this eBook is the result of readings, discussions with hundreds of probate clients, and experience in probate court. If we can help you and your family, I hope you will feel free to contact us at **(952) 888-2400** if you have questions or if we can help your family in the probate process.

Bill Peterson

