

# Moving On After a Loss

## Objective

To identify ways to move forward and what “moving on” means to you following the death of a loved one.

## What to Know

“Moving on” is a commonly used phrase related to grieving. What does it mean, and is it actually possible to move on? And if it is possible, how do you do it?

Grieving can involve many complicated and painful emotions. The weeks and months following the death might pass in a blur as you adjust to life without your loved one. Healing takes time, and there are no concrete timeframes for grieving because everyone copes with loss differently.

Moving on does not mean ignoring painful emotions. It does mean moving forward with hope for the future. Here are some suggestions to consider as you move forward.

**Seek support.** You might want to spend time alone as you grieve. Avoid isolating yourself because connections with loved ones can help you heal. Joining a support group or meeting with a counselor or spiritual leader can also help you gain perspective and hope.

**Find joy.** Consider adopting a pet, traveling, scheduling regular dinners with a friend, or joining a club.

**Avoid expectations about timeframes.** Grieving is not a time-limited experience, as it can suddenly reappear many years after the loss. You cannot process grief on a schedule.

**Take care of yourself.** After some time has passed, reestablish healthy habits to get your life back on track.

- Even if you are not hungry, try to eat nutritious meals at regularly scheduled intervals.
- Physical activity can elevate your mood, especially if you exercise outdoors on a sunny day.
- Try to sleep 7-8 hours each night.

**Avoid self-medicating with alcohol or drugs.** While substances might seem to provide relief, they can make it more difficult to heal. Healthy habits will be more effective in supporting you as you move on.

**Establish new patterns, routines, or habits.** If your old habits make it difficult to move on, develop some new routines or patterns. Here are some examples.

- If everything in your home reminds you of your loved one, donate items, redecorate, or rearrange the furniture.
- If you always watched certain television programs with your loved one, find a friend to watch them with you.

- If a particular neighborhood or street is a painful reminder, find a different driving or walking route.

**Engage in favorite activities.** Reintroduce favorite habits and activities into your life. They will distract you and allow you to get used to the “new normal.”

**Return to work.** Maybe you want to return to work because you love your job, or perhaps you must return for financial reasons. As you transition back to work:

- ask if you can have a lighter schedule at first
- work part-time or have reduced duties
- communicate your needs to your employer and co-workers

**Avoid making permanent life-changing decisions.** Maybe you want to sell your house or move to a new place. These are not decisions you want to make when you are in emotional pain. Take time to consider the consequences and seek advice if you do not feel you can make sound decisions.

**Embrace new experiences.** If you have always wanted to travel somewhere, or take up a hobby, now might be a great time to try something new. You might join others who are mourning a loss.

**Forgive yourself.** You might get distracted, make mistakes at work, or let things around the house slide. This is normal and to be expected. It might take a long time to feel normal after a loss. Forgive yourself and allow yourself time to recover.

**Understand grief may not entirely disappear.** Even if you believe you have moved on, grief might come back at unexpected times because it is like a wave that subsides and returns.

**Imagine a bright future.** Your deceased loved one would not want you to get stuck in a cycle of despair. Grieve, move forward, and create a happy future.

Remember these four important points:

**1. You are not responsible for how other people feel about your grieving process.** Others might expect you to stop:

- hurting
- talking about it
- remembering
- crying
- grieving

They may even encourage you to let go and just accept what happened. Have you considered that you might make them uncomfortable? It is difficult to watch someone they love hurting. But other peoples’ discomfort is their business.

**2. Moving on does not mean forgetting.** Moving on is learning to live a full and happy life even as you miss your deceased loved one. It is about remembering and honoring them while

embracing the beauty of the life you still get to live. Grief and loss are complex, multifaceted, and multilayered, and they integrate into your life. You can't simply get rid of them.

**3. Moving on does not mean the end of grief.** Moving on does not mean you are suddenly done grieving and you will never hurt again. Grief changes over time, and you will get stronger as you move forward.

**4. You define what "moving on" means to you.** You might have heard advice about how you should move on, when you should do it, and what it should look like. No one else can determine that for you because there are no timelines or rules for grieving. You will move through it at your own pace. Only you know when you are ready to move forward. Only you can decide what it means to move on.

This worksheet will help you identify ways to move forward and what "moving on" means to you.

### **What to Do**

First, answer the following questions.

What does "moving on" mean to you?

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What, if anything, concerns you about "moving on?"

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Do you feel ready to move on? Why or why not?

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Have you felt pushed or pressured to move on? Explain.

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Using the chart on the next page, write down some activities you are willing to do as you process your grief and move forward. Refer to the list above or come up with some of your own ideas. Write down the date, what you did, with whom, and how you felt after. You can track

your activities for one month (or even longer if you wish). No pressure – if you want to do one activity/week to start, that is okay. If you want to do one self-care activity each day, that is also okay. Do what feels right for you.

Date	What did you do?	With whom?	How did you feel after?

### Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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