

## Combat Veteran's Guidebook | 3 | What to Do About Grief

War takes.

You lose people you love because of it.

You lose relationship. With others, with your Self.

It all hurts like hell.

But surprisingly, you may not consider yourself to be grieving. Or even really know what that means.

Grief is a process of moving through emotions that come from losing something valuable to you. That includes people, relationships, skills, abilities, jobs, health, versions of yourself, your independence, confidence, finances, and expectations for what the future would be like.

Grief has five components:

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

These emotions come and go in waves, and there is no timeline for how long they last.

Being aware of these emotions and understanding that they are with you because you are grieving is important. Why? It allows you to quiet the Inner Critic, and honor your feelings for what they are.

Honor means to respect with admiration.

That's what your grief deserves from you.

It's also what your brothers and sisters in arms that you have lost deserve from you. You grieve them because you loved them, because they were people you respected and admired.

Pain and grief require respect to be able to have their place and heal. If you don't respect your own pain and grief for what they are, they won't be able to find the conditions to heal.

You must learn to be tender to your soul.

Just as you would be toward a child you love.

The difficulty in all this is that society puts an "acceptable timeframe" on grief and once that date has passed, people start to dismiss you as ineffective or weak.

You're neither.

Those people have not been through your unique losses or the trauma surrounding it.  
But they do have a subtle point: grief is not meant to control you forever.

You will never “get over” those who have died. You’re not supposed to.

You are, however, supposed to live.

Honorably. To honor them and their lives. To honor your own gift of life.

You know that Death is the energy of war. And warfighters die.

But those who survive are given a very special spiritual mission: to live life as fully as they can.

You are still here. You are meant to live.

Not to wallow in endless suffering or resign yourself to sucking it up and never moving forward.

No. You are stronger and more valuable than that.

After the initial shock and devastation, grief needs a container in your life so that it has its proper place.

You create this container by taking meaningful action.

You put the memory and value of the lives lost into doing something life-giving for others – *and life-giving for you.*

Grief needs to find a way to make a difference in this world, so that it can be released and healed. The energy of mourning the loss of life, must be expressed through doing something that *gives more life* to the world.

Be gentle with yourself. Be tender with your soul. But do not allow grief to keep you from life.

1. List the names of all those you have lost by death or end of relationship.
2. Next to each person’s name, write down what you loved most about them and the ways they added love, happiness or meaning to your life.
3. Say a prayer of appreciation to each one, thanking them for how they blessed you, affirming your love for them and ask them to help you make your life meaningful now.
4. What concrete actions can you take to honor each one? (Plant a tree, donate to a charity, spend time helping others, etc.)

5. On your calendar, add the anniversary of the dates of their deaths. Your body instinctively responds to these days already – which you may or may not connected the dots. Mood swings, more anger, edginess, depression, inability to focus all spike around anniversary dates. Be aware of this and be gentle with yourself during these times.
6. Consider how you can switch from remembering their deaths to celebrating their lives each year.
7. Know that their love for you has not ended and they are with you in spirit. It's okay to talk to them.

I know it hurts. The ache in your chest. We hold on and hurt, and we hurt to hold on.

There will come a point in your journey where you will come up to a decision: keep holding tightly to the grief and pain, or let go and allow yourself to find joy again.

The idea of letting yourself be happy or okay again feels like you're betraying the one who died.

You're not. Those who have died do not want their deaths to stop you from living. They want you to live and live fully, live happy. Happiness honors their lives. Sadness honors their deaths.

No one wants to be remembered for their death.

Don't be afraid to allow yourself to find joy again when you are ready. (You may be ready now.)

You will not lose them by letting go of grief; they will always be part of your soul's journey.