

GRIEF WHITE PAPER SERIES

I. HEALING MILESTONES: WHAT GRIEVERS CAN EXPECT

Loss and grief are universal experiences, yet grief is different for each loss. People want to know whether their grief is going the way it should. They want to know what to expect and when it will be over. But, grief is the form love takes when someone close dies and love doesn't die. Grief is permanent, but it quiets and softens over time as a bereaved person adapts to the loss and their changed circumstances. People do this in their own time and their own way. They do not progress through denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance as dying people seem to do. However, knowing HEALING milestones can be helpful to griever. It can also be helpful to know DERAILERS that can get the healing process off track. This White Paper introduces two acronyms, HEALING and DERAILERS, that can help guide grievers.

HEALING Milestones

- H**onor your loved one and yourself; reconnect with your own interests and values,
- E**ase emotional pain; get to know your emotions – both painful and pleasant ones,
- A**ccept grief and let it find a place in your life,
- L**earn to live with reminders of your loss,
- I**ntegrate memories in meaningful ways that can help you learn and grow.
- N**arrate stories of the death to understand and accept its reality
- G**ather friends and loved ones and let them into your life; let them support you.

These milestones indicate a griever is on a healing pathway to accept the reality of the loss and restore a sense of purpose and meaning, feelings of competence, and of mattering and belonging.

DERAILERS that can block HEALING

- D**oubt that you did enough for the person who died; caregiver self-blame
- E**mbracing the idea that intense grief is the only way to honor the person who died
- R**epeatedly imagining scenarios where the death didn't happen or happened differently, "if only" thinking
- A**nger and bitterness you can't resolve or let go of
- I**nsistent belief that this death was unfair or wrong or shouldn't have happened
- L**ack of faith in the possibility of adapting to the loss and having a promising future
- E**xcessive avoidance of reminders of the loss
- R**ejecting support from others, unable to let others help, feeling hurt and alone
- S**urvivor guilt that is stopping you from experiencing joy and satisfaction