Dual Process Model of Grief

Emotions: Balancing Your Grief and Your Daily Life

The dual process model of grief says that coping with a death means moving back and forth between facing your loss and dealing with the life that changed around it. Grief researchers Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut described the model in 1999. In their view, grieving people turn toward the loss for a while, then turn toward daily life, and sometimes rest from both. Use this worksheet to see where your days go and to plan a balance that fits you right now.

1 The two sides of coping

Loss-oriented Turning toward the loss	Time spent with your grief. You might cry, miss the person, look at photos, think about how they died, or remember your life together.
Restoration-oriented Turning toward life now	Time spent on what has changed. You might take on new jobs or roles, sort out money or paperwork, try something new, or take your mind off the loss for a while.
Moving between Oscillation	Coping means going back and forth between the two sides, facing the loss at times and turning away from it at others. Taking time off from both is part of coping too.

Why does this work? *Facing the loss helps you take in what happened, and dealing with daily life helps you adjust to a world that has changed. Stroebe and Schut suggested that moving between the two, with breaks, lets you do both without being worn down by either one. Turning away from your grief for a while is part of coping. It does not mean you have stopped caring.*

2 Notice where your days go

Think back over the last few days. Write down things you did, felt or thought about, and put an X in the column that fits best. Some things may fit more than one.

What I did, felt or thought about	The loss	Life now	Time off
Read old texts from my mom and cried	*X*		
Called the bank to close her account		*X*	
Watched a funny movie with a friend			*X*

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*

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3 Look at your balance

Over the last week, where did most of my time and energy go?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

about even

Mostly the loss *Mostly life now*

What do you notice about your balance?

Example: I keep busy all day and only let myself feel it at night, when I am too tired to cope.

Is anything getting left out, such as time to grieve, daily tasks, or rest?

4 Plan a balance for this week

Choose a few small things for each side. Keep them gentle and doable.

Time for my grief	Steps in daily life

One way I will take time off from both:

Example: A walk with the dog on Saturday morning, with no phone.

There is no right balance. Stroebe and Schut expected the loss to take up more attention early on and daily life to take up more as time goes on, with ups and downs along the way. If your grief stays very intense for a long time, or you find you cannot face it at all, a grief counselor or therapist can help. Grief support groups and hospice bereavement programs can also offer support. If you are in crisis or thinking about harming yourself, call or text 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in the US, or call your local emergency number.

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