

Grief Notes

October 2020

Grieving with Things Left Undone by Joel Wiggins, Bereavement Coordinator

After years of calling grieving people on the phone, I have noticed some trends. A lot of people find themselves overwhelmed following the death of a loved one. Many are not as surprised by being overwhelmed emotionally as they are with being overwhelmed with tasks that must be accomplished. Death brings with it a checklist of “administrative” tasks which must be accomplished by grieving loved ones. Funerals may need to be planned. Social Security may need to be contacted or life insurance policy claims completed. Some people find themselves stalled in probate court or standing in line at the bank to remove their loved one’s name from an account. All these tasks can prove wearisome and draining. At a time when we may feel like we can barely function to begin with, we are being asked to fill out important forms or make important decisions.

Sometimes in these cases, little to nothing has been done or prepared by our loved ones. The reasons for this may vary. Sometimes people who are dying are struggling with accepting their own death and somehow feel that preparing for the moment of death makes it too real. Whatever the reason, grieving loved ones are often left to pick up the pieces. This can add feelings of stress and even anger during an already difficult time.

There are a few things that can be helpful at this time. During such a stressful time it will become essential to set boundaries and priorities for what must be accomplished.

1. You should prioritize tasks that are the most time sensitive such as picking a funeral home. Some tasks such as altering the names on bank accounts can be pushed to a later date.
2. When possible, accept help from others and divide up responsibilities. People are often willing to assist, but we must in turn be willing to let them. In instances where there are multiple family members involved, it may be helpful to divide up and assign various tasks so that one person does not become overwhelmed.
3. Know your limits. There are times when we must stop for our own mental well-being. You can set up small tasks, while also scheduling yourself time to rest and take mental breaks.

One final thing may be helpful to consider. If you are grieving and overwhelmed as you deal with tasks that follow your loved one’s death, it may be a good chance to consider what will happen when you die. Many tasks can be accomplished well in advance. For instance, many funeral homes will allow you to set up all your own arrangements. You don’t have to be dying to consider doing something like this. If you as the griever feel stressed and overwhelmed now, please consider how your loved ones will feel and cope when it is your turn to go. Preparing and thinking ahead is a gift you will leave for them in those difficult moments and will likely allow them to have a smoother grieving process than the one you are currently facing.



Check out this helpful online resource:

www.aarp.org: search Checklist for What to Do After Someone Dies

<https://www.aarp.org/home-family/friends-family/info-2020/when-loved-one-dies-checklist.html>