

PLAYBOOK OF HOPE

TIP 1: Embody self love

“ The love in the world begins with
the love within ourselves.

DEEPAK CHOPRA

Why it matters

Self affirmation is good medicine, especially when grieving. Self-love creates a caring space within you that's free of judgment and replaces self criticism with kindness and caring.

Studies show that loving yourself leads to less stress and more optimism, and can actually guide you through adversity. It's not as hard as you think to retrain your inner criticism. How would you treat a dear friend recovering from surgery? With tender loving care. Now make yourself your own dear friend.

5-minute exercise

Find yourself a quiet spot. It can be your favorite chair, in your car, in your office, or even your garden. Now clear your head and for 5 minutes think only compassionate thoughts about yourself. Not your spouse, not your children, not your coworkers, but yourself. Having trouble? Fill in the blanks below, and give yourself permission to really validate your positive qualities.

I have a _____

Example: good heart, gentle soul, witty personality

I make a _____

Example: good lasagna, potato salad, scrapbook, quilt

I'm a good _____

Example: friend, gardener, knitter, painter, organizer

TIP 2: Encourage supportive relationships

“ In the sweetness of friendship let there be laughter and sharing of pleasures.

KHALIL GIBRAN

Why it matters

Nourishment is life sustaining. We eat nutritious foods to fuel our bodies. We engage in activities to nourish the soul. We volunteer time and resources to nourish those around us. Yet we often neglect to develop nourishing relationships, especially when grieving.

It's important to find friends with whom we can share stories and express ourselves freely without judgement. Seek out those who settle for less than perfection and will surround you with support. Those types of friendships are fulfilling and rewarding, and are an essential element of a happy life.

Because loving bonds come in a variety of flavors, look for healthy friendships in a variety of places.

7 tips to good relationships

- Listen. Avoid starting any sentence with “You should . . .”
- Be authentic. Honesty is a cornerstone.
- Be one another’s cheerleader. Inspire.
- Cultivate joyful memories together.
- Give without expectations.
- Protect confidentiality.
- Love yourself first.

Tip 3: Engage in pleasure

Why it matters

When grieving the loss of someone we love, restoring happiness sometimes can feel out of reach. Using your five senses, treat yourself to things that look, feel, smell, taste, or sound good. Taking time to enjoy life's little pleasures by evoking sensorial joy is an important reminder that not all pleasure is lost.

Rule of 5s

Every day practice the Rule of 5s by enjoying the following:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

With practice, the awareness of delight eventually becomes effortless, and is an important step toward restoring happiness.

Suggestions:

- Shower or bathe with a lovely scented soap (scent)
- Soak in a warm tub with Epsom salts or bath oil (touch)
- Wear a pair of extra soft socks (touch)
- Light a fragrant candle (scent)
- Listen to relaxing music (sound)
- Apply a rich lotion to your skin before bed (touch, scent)
- Enjoy a mug of your favorite soothing herbal tea (taste)
- Watch the sun rise (sight)

Tip 4: Dance around

“ When you dance, your purpose is not to get to a certain place on the floor. It's to enjoy each step along the way.

DR. WAYNE DYER

Why it matters

Feelings can influence your movement, and movement can impact your feelings. If you tend to shut down when stressed, stress-relieving activities that get you moving yield many positive benefits.

Movement is one of the most basic functions of the body, making it easy to find ways to incorporate Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT) into daily life in a way that feels good.

DMT benefits us physically and mentally through stress reduction, mood management, increased mobility, decreased muscle tension, and more. DMT uses movement to help achieve emotional, cognitive, physical and social integration, and can be used with individuals, couples, families, or groups. It promotes self-awareness, self-esteem, and a safe, nonjudgmental space for the expression of feelings.

Alternative options:

- Run in place or jump up and down
- Go for a short walk
- Squeeze a rubbery stress ball
- Window shop
- Gardening
- Stretching
- Grocery shop with a basket instead of a cart
- Romp around with the kids or grandkids
- Walk, bike, or hike

Tip 5: Give joy

“ She who heals others heals herself.

LYNDA CHELDELIN FELL

Why it matters

Winston Churchill once said, “We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.” In other words, helping others helps our own heart to heal.

Giving is good for the giver in that it induces a natural high. It generates positive emotions that trigger a release of dopamine which regulates pleasure in the brain. It also evokes internal gratitude which helps to heal our heart. Further, giving to others facing struggles helps us feel less alone.

Additional bonuses are the multiple—and proven—health benefits of giving: less stress, lower blood pressure, improved sleep, increased self-esteem, and greater happiness.

Ways to give:

- Donate to a charity.
- Smile at a stranger.
- Give a compliment.
- Volunteer in the community.
- Do random acts of kindness.
- Hold the door open for someone.
- Feed the homeless in a soup kitchen.
- Distribute blessing bags to the homeless.
- Leave a nice note for someone at work or school.
- Let a driver merge in front of you during rush hour traffic.
- Leave a bouquet of balloons in a park for children to find.
- Send an anonymous care package to someone who is struggling.

Tip 6: Evolve gratitude

“ At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lit the flames within us.

ALBERT SCHWEITZER

Why it matters

Gratitude is an intentional mindset and powerful healing modality. While it can be hard to evolve gratitude when grieving someone we love, daily gratitude by consciously counting our blessings—a thankful appreciation for what we have—gets easier with practice. The more grateful we are, the more gratitude we have.

Begin by creating a Gratitude Jar and filling it with collateral blessings—unexpected silver linings resulting from life challenges.

“Our oldest daughter prefers oil to my water, snow to my sun, and city to my country. But in the aftermath of losing our youngest daughter, or oldest daughter and I clung to one another, and became best friends. That’s a blessing I’m truly grateful for.”

– Lynda Cheldelin Fell

Create a Gratitude Jar

- Once a day think about what you’re grateful for.
- Have an open mind.
- Allow yourself to feel gratitude.
- Note your gratitude on a slip of paper.
- Add it to your jar.
- Share it with someone else.

Tip 7: Embrace laughter

“ Laughter offsets the impact of mental stress. Fifteen minutes of laughter on a daily basis is good for the soul.

MICHAEL MILLER, M.D.

Why it matters

The heart can hold joy the same time as sorrow, so go ahead and laugh. One laugh can scatter a hundred griefs, and help to fill the joyful side and balance the sorrow.

Laughter is also a powerful healing modality. Smiling and laughter stimulate the facial muscles that trigger the brain to release happy hormones called endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals that promote an overall sense of well-being. Studies show that laughter can temporarily relieve pain, decreases stress and increases immune and infection-fighting antibodies.

Because the body can't tell the difference between a real or fake smile, hold a pencil between your teeth to “fake it until you make it.” The brain can't tell the difference and will be tricked into releasing those feel-good chemicals anyway.

Above all, enjoy those moments when the pain isn't as suffocating and you'll find that you don't have to choose between sorrow or joy—the heart has room for both. So go ahead and engage in laughter yoga, watch that funny movie for the nth time, take time out to enjoy YouTube videos, or I Love Lucy reruns.

Whatever makes you laugh is truly good medicine.

5-minute exercise

Enjoy a good belly laugh every single day.

Tip 8: Find an outlet

“ When grieving, it can feel as if everything in life has changed, and often it has. Creativity can be a solid, comforting, and familiar friend—a pillar of self-support.

KATHERINE PARROTT

Why it matters

The brain can't tell the difference between physical and emotional pain, making it very important to engage in activities that gives your brain a respite from the grief and help you to engage in life.

Studies show that performing a repetitive action such as coloring, beading or knitting induces a meditative state, calms your mood, and can even result in a new craft or gifts to give.

Gallup conducted a study that showed people who use their gifts to help others experience the same benefits of giving. You get to exercise your talent and receive all the benefits of giving while others benefit from the giving of your talent. You can also use your outlet to validate and strengthen personal competency.

Suggestions:

- Learn to mold chocolate
- Learn to make soap
- Bead, knit, crochet, or quilt
- Volunteer in the community
- Learn a new sport such as golf
- Create a garden in a forgotten part of the yard
- Join Pinterest or a book club
- Doodle, draw, or mold clay
- Crochet a prayer shawl
- Sew a memorial quilt
- Join a community choir
- Read to children at the library
- Translate for a community organization

Tip 9: Find external support

“ Anything is possible when you have the right people there to support you.

MISTY COPELAND

Why it matters

It's important to surround yourself with people who speak your loss language, and studies show that peer support is essential after loss. Family and friends are often grieving the same loss, and may not have enough emotional energy to support you both. External support offers a safe, nurturing environment to share stories and express feelings freely without judgement.

Support comes in a variety of flavors so if one isn't a good fit, try another. If you don't feel ready, try again in a month or two. Support is critical to your healing, so have resources ready and available, and don't give up.

Types of support:

- Employee assistance program
- National organizations
- Medical provider
- Group support
- Private support
- Online groups
- Peer to peer
- Social clinic
- Hospice
- Clergy

Tip 10: Sleep well

“ Have courage for the great sorrows of life and patience for the small ones; and when you have laboriously accomplished your daily task, go to sleep in peace.

VICTOR HUGO

Why it matters

Healthy sleep habits are an essential part of caring for yourself and can make a big difference in your quality of life. Studies show that good sleep helps you cope better in times of stress. It can also lower your blood pressure, improve your memory, help keep your immunity strong, and puts you in a better mood.

Referred to as good sleep hygiene, healthy sleep habits can influence the body's circadian rhythms. What you eat, drink, how much daylight and physical exercise you get all play a role. Try the following suggestions from the National Sleep Foundation to help establish a good sleep pattern.

Sleep hygiene tips:

- To help regulate your body's clock, stick to a sleep schedule of the same bedtime and wake up time, even on the weekends.
- Create a relaxing bedtime ritual such as a warm bath or reading to give your body time to wind down.
- Exercise daily but not in the evening. Vigorous exercise is best, but even light exercise is better than no exercise.
- A sleep environment between 60 and 67 degrees is ideal.
- If your partner snores, consider using a fan, earplugs, or white noise.
- Use a comfortable pillow and soothing bed linen that feel good to you.
- Avoid bright light in the evening to keep your circadian rhythm in check.
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, cigarettes, and heavy evening meals which can disrupt your sleep.

A word about resilience

“ Life doesn't get easier or more forgiving,
we get stronger and more resilient.

JAMAIS CASCIO

What is resilience?

Resilience is the ability to adapt to life difficulties—including loss of a loved one. Building resilience through strategies that support the brain, body, and emotions during difficult times can help reduce the damaging effects of grief.

The goal

The goal of Resilience Rx™ is to offer self-help techniques that trigger positive hormones—dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin—to offset stress and support you as you learn to move forward with your loved one in your heart.

How do you strengthen resilience?

The first step is to take good care of yourself. We can't always predict loss and other stressors, but practicing self-help techniques that tend to our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs can help anchor and strengthen our ability to weather times of upheaval.

There are multiple ways to trigger positive hormones. Use this Resilience Rx™ resource as one of your tools in your self-care toolbox to help lift your spirits and soothe your heart when mourning the loss of someone you love.