

The Fourth Task of Mourning:

To Find an Enduring Connection with the Deceased in the Midst of Embarking on a New Life



The Four Tasks of Mourning are a framework for understanding grief with a goal of integrating your grief into everyday life. The Tasks of Mourning are based on the research and practical experience of therapist and psychology professor William Worden, Ph.D. Although the Fourth Task—*To Find an Enduring Connection with the Deceased in the Midst of Embarking on a New Life*, doesn't have to be completed last, the collective goal of all the tasks is really highlighted within this last one. The wording of this task is very particular and intentional. Worden revised it several times to make the meaning clear. He wanted to emphasize that you are not moving on nor are you ever finished grieving the deceased, but you are embarking on this new part of your life without your loved one.

The Fourth Task involves establishing a new relationship with the deceased. Grief Counselor Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt explains this transition as “converting the relationship with the person who has died from one of presence to one of memory” (Wolfelt, 2012). The key part of the Fourth Task is that you continue to live your own life. It is common to feel like your life stopped, too, when your loved one died, and that you cannot resume living in a meaningful way without them, but there are ways to find an appropriate, ongoing connection with the person who died, while continuing with your own life. Keep in mind that this task is not about detaching from the deceased but finding a healthy and healing way to develop a continuing bond. Part of creating this new life is finding activities and relationships that are energizing to you and help create meaning in your life. Here are some ideas that you may find helpful when contemplating the Fourth Task.

- **Set aside reflection time each day.** Take time to remember your loved one that died. This way, you have an allotted time each day to devote entirely to them, and the rest of the day you will be able to focus your energy on other responsibilities and people.
- **Write letters to the deceased person.** Periodically update your loved one on your life, and release all of your feelings and thoughts onto paper. This allows you to express your emotions while maintaining a sense of communication and connection with the person that died.
- **Keep a photo or belonging of the deceased with you.** This is a physical reminder of the deceased's presence. It can serve as a reminder that they are still with you, just in a different capacity, and it allows you to live your everyday life without feeling like you left them behind. Consider keeping a photo in your wallet or car, or wearing a piece of jewelry that belonged to the deceased.
- **Allow your children to find their own meaningful connection.** Children often feel connected with the person who died by speaking to them, dreaming of them, or feeling like they are watched by their loved one. Encourage your children to welcome these interactions because it may be how they choose to maintain a relationship.
- **Accept your emotions.** The grief journey never truly ends. When someone close to you dies, you grieve them in some capacity for the rest of your life. The hope is that the grief will become integrated into your everyday life and be less painful over time. Give yourself permission to express emotion nonjudgmentally.
- **Do things you used to enjoy.** These could be crafts, movies, book clubs, or sports. Take up one of these activities and remind yourself how much you enjoyed it. This may also remind you that it is okay to continue living without your loved one. Invest your energy in things that bring you pleasure.
- **Pick up a new hobby.** Because the Fourth Task of mourning is about embarking on a new life, consider starting something different. Try a new hobby, initiate a new friendship, or join a new organization to symbolize this new





life and remind you that it is all right to go on living without the deceased.

- **Welcome change.** Life after the death of your loved one will inevitably be full of change. Do your best to welcome it. Try not to feel as if you are leaving the deceased behind. Instead, find new ways to love and honor your loved one. As discussed in several group activities at Bo's Place, change can be uncomfortable but something beautiful may result. The best connections you can have with anyone-living or dead-are the ones that encourage you to grow and change with the patterns of your own life.

Embarking on a new life involves finding your own ways of satisfying your social, emotional, and practical needs by developing new or changed activities or relationships. This is not dishonoring the memory of the deceased, but instead is reminding yourself that there are also other things and people to be loved, and that you are still capable of loving and having a rich and full life.

Remember that the four tasks, though numbered, do not have to be completed in order. If you are feeling "stuck" at any one task, you can intentionally try moving to one of the other tasks. Grief is unique for everyone and is a constant process.

Further Reading:

- *Closure* by Nancy Berns
- *Grandma's Scrapbook* and *Grandpa Loved* by Josephine Nobisso
- *How to Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies* by Therese A. Rando, Ph.D.
- *There Will Come a Time* by Carrie Arcos

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- Wolfelt, Ph.D., A. (2012). *Companioning the Grieving Child*. Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press.
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- Worden's Four Tasks of Mourning. (2013, June 24). Retrieved June 22, 2015, from <http://www.whatsyourgrief.com/wordens-four-tasks-of-mourning/>

