THE GRIEF JOURNEY – 10 Steps

"Attending to our unattended sorrow opens the way to new life." ---Stephen Levine

ONE: Open to the Presence of Your Loss
By setting a positive intention to take the journey of healing, you will also be making a commitment to gently embrace your pain. In so doing, you will honor and respect your grief and take action that is self-enhancing and life-affirming for you.

TWO: Dispel the Misconceptions about Grief
By being educated about the grief journey, you will also be able to empower yourself on this difficult, yet necessary path. First of all, it is helpful to know that grief refers to your internal thoughts, feelings, meaning and the images you are experiencing with loss. Mourning is when you take your internal process and bring it out to the world with expressions such as words, movements, rituals or other means of communication. Other concepts that add strength to your healing process are knowing that grief does not occur in orderly stages, that crying is not a sign of weakness, that you must embrace your pain in order to heal and that you need to reach out for support and not walk this journey alone.

THREE: Embrace the Uniqueness of Your Grief
By recognizing your uniqueness, you will also explore many important factors. These include: your relationship with the person who has died or with your loss, the circumstances of the death or your loss, the ritual experience regarding the death or loss, how your own personality, your gender, your culture, religion or spiritual background affect your experience of grief and mourning, as well as other unique factors.

FOUR: Explore Your Feelings of Loss
You may be surprised just how many different emotions you experience as a result of the death or loss. Feelings may include the full range of emotions: numbness, disbelief, denial, disorganization, confusion, searching, longing, anxiety, fear, panic, anger, guilt, regret, deep sadness, relief and release.

FIVE: Recognizing You Are Not Crazy
In addition to the feelings mentioned above, you may also experience the following: time distortion, self-absorption, needing to tell and retell your story, sudden mood shifts, feelings of helplessness and powerlessness, grief outbursts, sobbing, identifying with the physical symptoms of the person who has died, various types of dreams, mystical experiences, as well as wondering if and how you can go on living.

SIX: Understand the Six Needs of Mourning
In addition to actually accepting the reality of the death or loss and allowing yourself to feel the pain, it will also be part of your grief journey to find a way to remember the person who has died or what you have lost. You will also need to create a new self-identity, find meaning and purpose for your life and allow others to support you, as you take the journey through grief and begin to move into the future.

SEVEN: Nurture Yourself
Since grief impacts you on a physical, emotional, cognitive, social and spiritual level, it is imperative to find ways to practice self-care. It is essential to care for your physical self, to honor and express your emotions and to be aware of how grief affects your ability to think, make decisions and take in important information. Also by reaching out to others, you will gain new perspectives and feel a deeper sense of well-being and belonging.

EIGHT: Reach Out for Help
Whether you have been a person who has always been independent and able to do everything for yourself, now is the time to make a change in your behavior and find the courage to seek outside support. With the help of others, you will find an outlet to express your grief to others, have the opportunity to feel the comfort of being companioned, find validation for your suffering and ultimate hope for your future.

NINE: Seek Reconciliation, Not Resolution
Although you will never 'get over' the death of a loved one or a significant loss, you will learn to reconcile your loss. What this means is that you will be able to integrate the loss into your life and accept it as your new reality. By reconciliation, you will experience renewed energy and confidence in moving forward, your emotions will soften, and you will obtain a genuine sense of hope, meaning and purpose for living and embracing your future.

TEN: Appreciate Your Transformation
Having taken your journey through grief, your loss has forever changed who you are. You will find yourself to have grown deeper in wisdom, understanding and compassion. You will know yourself in new ways, including your values, your priorities and new insights. With your transformation also comes the opportunity to live and express your true potential and have a life of peace, joy and new meaning.

From *Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart* by Dr. Alan Wolfelt.