

# Getting Unstuck: The Things that Keep us from Moving Forward

*By David Stephenson*

Losing someone close to us is among the most difficult experiences in our lives. As we go through our grief journey, we may find we become stuck, unable to move forward. This can happen in a variety of ways. Understanding these and then working through them can help us on our path toward healing. Here are some things that may help.

**Changing our Perspective** - A couple weeks after my wife died, I was staring out a window when I saw the most amazing sunset. It was the kind of thing we would have called the other over to watch and then enjoyed together. Instead, it made me incredibly sad as I had no one to share it with. I wondered whether I would ever appreciate beauty or feel truly happy again. But then I stopped and asked myself if there was a different way to look at this. What if, I thought, Annette was the one sharing this with me? Just by asking that question, I realized that not only could I see this beauty but knew that Annette was there with me in my heart. Now, whenever I see or experience beauty or the things I enjoy, instead of preventing myself from feeling good, I thank Annette for the ability to appreciate them, and this makes me feel deeply connected to her. Consider how changing your perspective may help you move forward.

**Forgiveness for ourselves and others** – It's natural for us to feel regret or guilt for the things we wish we had or hadn't done. This can be even more pronounced when a person dies as we've lost the ability to set things right. We can no longer tell the person who died how much we loved them or how sorry we are. Some of us may feel anger *toward* the person who died, especially if we feel they could have treated us better, had healthier habits, gone to the doctor sooner, or taken fewer risks.

These feelings are very real and painful. It's important to express these, either to others or perhaps by writing a letter to the person who died, expressing what you would want them to know and/or what you have learned, or perhaps what you feel they might want to say to you. Talk to others and be honest with your feelings. Ultimately, you will need to reconcile the anger, regret, or guilt you are feeling so you can move forward. Forgiveness is powerful. This may not be quick or easy, but setting your intention to do this, and then actively moving toward this is an important first step.

**Taking on the unfamiliar** – When a person dies, especially one with whom we lived, we often find that absolutely everything has changed. Not only are we grieving, but if that person did the cooking, finances, or fixed things around our home, we may find ourselves overwhelmed, wondering how these things will get done when we may have no idea how to do them. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Many of our friends and family want to be there for us, but don't know what we need unless we tell them and then let them help. Starting slowly, we can learn to do these things, which in time makes us more confident and resilient moving forward.

**Find Hope and Lean into Gratitude** – In those early days after Annette's death, what I hoped for most is that she would magically walk through the door and mend my shattered world. Recognizing this was impossible, I also hoped there would be a day when the unrelenting, physically crushing anguish and pain I felt might dissipate, that there might even be a day when

I could feel normal again. Setting intention is a critical first step. Lean into gratitude—for the relationship you shared with the person who died; for the love of friends, family, or even strangers who understand what you feel and support you; for the ability to cry and feel all the complicated emotions inside of you. This is love deeply felt.

If you do a search on the words “gratitude and hope” you will find dozens of websites describing the science on the upward spiraling relationship between gratitude, optimism, hope and joy. In my own journey toward healing, I have found this to be the single most powerful and effective daily practice.

What is written above is not an exhaustive list. Consider what things might be preventing you from moving through your grief, and what you would like the future to look like. What can you do to move past those roadblocks and continue toward that future?