

Using the H.A.L.T. Self-Care Tool When You Are Grieving

Objective

To apply the H.A.L.T. self-care tool to cope with grief.

What to Know

Sometimes when you are grieving, you might interpret your frame of mind or emotions as part of the grieving process. What you might not have considered is your grief might be compounded by things you have some control over.

Sometimes angry or sad feelings might threaten to overtake you. You might just want to be alone, and maybe you wonder if you will ever feel better. When you have intense feelings, you can stop, calm down, and think. H.A.L.T. can help you remember to do this.

When you are overwhelmed by grief, H.A.L.T. and ask yourself, "Am I hungry, angry, lonely, or tired?" Review the questions below.

H = Am I Hungry? Some people overeat when they are distressed, while some people avoid food. Each choice can have a negative impact on your health and mental well-being. Ask yourself:

- Have I eaten something within the past 4-6 hours?
- Have I had enough water in the past 2 hours?
- Have I eaten too much sugary food today?
- In general, is my diet balanced and nutritious?
- Am I grazing and/or overeating?
- Do I have an underlying medical condition such as diabetes which might impact my ability to think clearly?

Take note: If you have ever been diagnosed as borderline diabetic, intense grief can send you over the edge. Make an appointment with your doctor.

If you forget to eat or you do not feel like eating, set an alarm on your phone to remember to eat. Fueling your body appropriately is important so you have the energy to do all the things grief requires. If you are overeating, portion out healthy snacks that will help you feel full. Instead of grazing or eating sugary snacks, take a walk or do some stretching exercises.

A = Am I Angry? It is OK to be angry; let go of any guilt you have for your anger. Ask yourself:

- Did someone say something that upset me?
- Has someone done or *not* done something?

- Am I angry at God?
- Am I angry at the deceased for leaving/for choices they made/for not saying “good-bye” to me?
- Am I angry at myself for things I really could not control?
- Am I angry with others because they are not grieving like I am?
- Am I angry that the world simply goes on without my loved one?
- Am I angry at friends or other loved ones that have not “been there” for me?

First, acknowledge your anger. If you are angry with someone else, can you talk to them and mend the relationship? If that is not an option, what boundaries can you put in place while you are experiencing intense feelings of grief? If you are angry at God or the deceased person, express it in a journal or letter, or talk about it with a loved one or grief counselor. Perhaps you just need to express yourself. It may not “fix” things, but it makes them more tolerable.

L = Am I Lonely? Grief can be an isolating experience. Once the funeral is over and the first few weeks pass, the people around you might not think about your loss or realize its ongoing impact on your daily life. There might be days when you feel very alone. Ask yourself:

- Do I feel isolated with my grief?
- How long has it been since I spent time with other people?
- Have I called/texted/messaged anyone today?
- Has anyone called/texted/messaged me today?
- Do I feel like nobody understands me?
- Do I feel like God abandoned me?
- Do I feel unable to talk to anyone anymore because of my loss?

What can you do to reduce your feelings of loneliness? Perhaps you can join an online bereavement community where you can vent your feelings, or local support group where you will be received, affirmed, and understood. You might just need someone safe to talk to. If you do not have friends or family that can fill that need, consider grief counseling.

T = Am I Tired? Perhaps you suffer from insomnia or find you cannot stay asleep once you fall asleep. Ask yourself:

- Did I sleep last night?
- Am I going to bed too late or waking too early?
- Am I keeping myself so busy that I have run myself down?
- Am I getting adequate and appropriate exercise?
- Am I taking medication that makes me sleepy?

Without proper rest, you will not have the energy to do the work grief requires. If you are struggling with sleeplessness, consider asking your healthcare provider for help. There are natural sleep remedies that might be appropriate, or you might consider a prescription

medicine to help break the cycle of insomnia.

Hunger, anger, loneliness, and feeling tired are not the root cause of your grief. You grieve because you suffered a loss. But any one of them, or a combination, can make you more vulnerable to feeling worse as you grieve. You will feel pain and sorrow, but you can make adjustments in your lifestyle and life choices to make it easier to cope.

This worksheet will assist you in applying H.A.L.T. as you grieve.

What to Do

It might be helpful to have a plan in place when you need to H.A.L.T. On the card below, write down your H.A.L.T. Plan. What will you do when you are hungry, angry, lonely, or tired? Write some specific things you can do. You can make your H.A.L.T. card on cardstock, or laminate it and cut it out. Place it in your wallet, or where you can see it. You can even type the plan into the “notes” on your phone.

My H.A.L.T. Plan	
When I am...	I will...
Hungry	_____
Angry	_____
Lonely	_____
Tired	_____

Reflections on This Exercise

Was it helpful to apply the H.A.L.T. tool? Why or why not?

H.A.L.T. will not make your grief go away, but did you find that you felt better when you attended to self-care? Explain.

What are some ways you can remind yourself to H.A.L.T.?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
