

# Dealing with the Loss of a Loved One while in Recovery



Dealing with the loss of a loved one is difficult for anyone. If you're a recovering addict, however, it can often feel like the biggest hurdle that has ever been placed in front of you. On top of trying to handle the usual grief that accompanies any death, you must also rise above your gut response to take quick solace in drugs or alcohol.

Michael Bloch, a recovered addict and blogger on [www.worldwideaddiction.com](http://www.worldwideaddiction.com), wrote about what he experienced when dealing with the death of his mother while in recovery: “while we (recovering addicts) are entitled to feel the same range of emotions as “normal” human beings; we cannot afford to feel them with the same intensity. It's just way too dangerous, as it is in these intense moments that even normal people temporarily lose touch with reality”.

What he likely means, is that many non-addicts when faced with death might indulge in a three-day drinking binge, or pop a few anti-depressants to help with the short-term emotional pain. Addicts, however, cannot use substances to numb the pain, not even once – even if they have been sober for years. So what can you do when the grief and emotions come flooding down on you?

## 1. Reach out for Support

The most important thing to do is to reach out to your support system – be it friends, family, counsellors, sober mentors, or anyone else trustworthy who has your best interests in mind. In your recovery program, you've probably already made a list of who these people are. Be open with your feelings, and allow them inside to try to understand how you're feeling. The more you let them in, the better the help they can offer.

## 2. Acknowledge and Honour all Emotions

Being honest and accepting of the emotions that are flooding through your mind, no matter how crazy they might seem, will help bring you closer to being able to accept the loss and get past this hurdle in your recovery. Whether they are feelings of anger, sadness or disbelief – recognizing those feelings and letting them run their course is important. Sit down and cry if the feeling strikes, hit some golf balls to let off steam if you're feeling angry, or grab a friend and go for a walk in the woods to help clear your mind.

For many addicts, losing friends and fellow addicts along the road to recovery is fairly common. If the loved one that has passed is a current or former addict, it's not uncommon to have guilty thoughts such as “why him, and not me?”. However, it is important to remember that your life was not spared because his was taken. Their death and your survival are not related. Instead, you need to appreciate the fact that you got help before it was too late, and make a decision to stay sober, strong and healthy in their honour.



### 3. Attend Group Meetings

In the beginning stages of recovery, group meetings are common place but often wither out with time. After a traumatic event, it's a good idea to return to regular meetings – at least for a while. Either head back to the same group meetings as before, or join the local AA or NA meetings with a new group of people. At the very least, being surrounded by people who understand the cravings you're experiencing will allow you to speak freely of your feelings and hopefully come to terms with these feelings faster. As well, speaking to others who have been down the same road before and have come out on top can be very encouraging. Likewise, any members of the group who are just starting out on the road to recovery, or who have recently relapsed, may be a helpful reminder of all the pain that comes with indulging in your substance – and will aid in providing you with another good reason to stay sober.

### 4. Get Personal Counselling

If the urges to take mood-altering substances are strong, then a professional counsellor should be brought in immediately. Counsellors are not only trained to deal with this situation, but they've seen it many times before. They will be able to help you through the grieving process – help you come to terms with your own feelings and what life will be like without that person in it.

Getting over the death of a loved one is a very difficult task, and for many, grief and sadness is a feeling that will follow for months or years beyond the death – so staying ahead of your addictive tendencies is incredibly important. In the words of recovering addict Michael Bloch, “If you're an addict on the road to recovery, be prepared to experience emotions in a new way – the good and the bad; and be sure to have a plan in place to fight off the cravings while you're in that vulnerable state.” He stayed sober after the death of his mother, and so can you stay sober when tragedy hits you.