



H.O.P.E. - HELPING OVERCOME & PROVIDE ENCOURAGEMENT

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“You have to get over the hurdles and keep running.”

Those words are often spoken by Morocco’s Olympic athlete, a woman named Nawal El Moutawekil. After spending her childhood running through the streets of Casablanca, Nawal used her running talent to earn a track scholarship to Iowa State University. There she won numerous titles and, in 1984, became the only woman on the Moroccan team at the Los Angeles Olympics.

There, she blew away her competition in the 400-meter hurdles earning Morocco its first gold medal. At the same time, Nawal made history becoming the first Muslim woman and first African woman to win a gold medal. As she ran her victory lap with a large Moroccan flag in hand, citizens back home poured into the streets of Casablanca in the middle of the night to celebrate.

As a national hero, Nawal used her celebrity status to help other Muslim women in sports. Although Morocco supported her athletic effort, Nawal knew other Muslim women were not as fortunate. She organized a women’s 10K race in Casablanca which now draws more than 27,000 participants. Nawal continues to provide sports leadership in her country as well as on Olympic planning committees.

Today she sums up her triumph saying: “My athletic race was the 400-meter hurdles, but it has been a metaphor for my life...*You have to get over the hurdles and keep running.*”

Those words are both inspiring and motivating for anyone dealing with grief. The death of a loved one creates many “hurdles”. There are “hurdles” of pain, of depression, of anxiety, of loneliness, of frustration. One at a time, each person must get over the hurdles and keep running. “Press on. Obstacles are seldom the same size tomorrow as they are today”, advises Robert H. Schuller, author and minister.

DON’T ASK: JUST DO IT’ - A RECENT WIDOW SPEAKS

A woman wrote an advice columnist explaining her husband died. “He was only 50 and was not ill, so it was extremely unexpected,” she explained. The woman also said her husband was well known, respected and loved in the community. As a result, “I have had an outpouring from people asking what they can do to help, which is quite thoughtful.”

However, the new widow outlined an issue common to many whose grief is fresh: “I don’t know how to respond when people ask what they can do for me. I am uncomfortable asking people for help with minor things, even though right now I am struggling to do these small things.” (continued on next page)



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(continued from previous page) She makes this suggestion to those who want to help at the time of loss: “Don’t ask. Just do it. Come mow the lawn, bring by a few necessary grocery items, come on over and run the vacuum for me, take my dogs for a walk, etc... These small gestures would be a blessing right now.”

“YES, YOU CAN”... COPE WITH THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE

Immediately after a death, those left behind often experience the feeling they will never ever be ‘normal’ again. The truth is that every day people overcome grief and find ways to regain the joy of living. You can cope with the death of a loved one. Here are some suggestions:

- *You can grieve naturally.* Allow yourself to feel the pain and the loss. This will mean experiencing tears as well as a variety of emotional feelings: depression, frustration, regret, guilt, anger, sadness.
- *You can express your feelings.* Shed tears when necessary. Be patient with sadness and depression.
- *You can express and explore your feelings* with a compassionate, wise friend. Sharing your grief is a way of reducing it’s pain and impact on your life.
- *You can get support.* Early in grieving, you ought to make a mental note of people who are of comfort to you. Spend time in their company. They will help you heal quicker.

- *You can nurture your physical self.* Eat balanced meals. Drink plenty of water. Exercise daily.
- *You can nurture your spiritual self.* Maintain a link to your place of worship. Join a spiritual study group. Pray and meditate. Join a yoga class.
- *You can forgive yourself* for things said or not said; things done or not done.
- *You can maintain your normal lifestyle.* Unless absolutely necessary, avoid making any major changes - moving, taking a new job, making different investments.
- *You can educate yourself.* Read books and magazine articles about grief and grief recovery.
- *You can avoid medicating yourself.* Stay away from alcohol and drugs. They may numb your pain but it always comes back. Better to be with the pain until it eases away naturally.
- *You can give yourself a break from grieving* by returning to work, getting a job if you didn’t have one, volunteering your time.
- *You can join a support group.* There are many varieties of grief groups. Some are for widows and widowers, some for those who have lost a child, some for survivors of suicide.
- *You can talk to others who have had a loss.* Ask them to share their experience and insights.
- *You could form a grief support group* if your community does not have one. Try to partner with a member of the clergy, a funeral director, a nurse. This will help you as well as those who participate.
- *You could be patient with yourself.* It takes time - usually longer than people think - for grief adjustment to take place. Be patient.