



HEALTH

Q: I'm a 50-year-old married woman with a loving family — husband, son, daughter-in-law and grandchild. My 80-year-old ailing mother recently passed away after prolonged illness. She used to live with us and I was able to provide her with the best treatment and care I possibly could. While I loved her very much, I sometimes used to wish that she would die before me so that both of our suffering would end. When she passed, even before the grief struck, I was hit by a sense of relief. Is this normal? I am overcome by immense guilt at feeling this way.

A: Losing a loved one, especially a parent, is hard at any age and being a caregiver takes a toll on both one's mental and physical health. You are going through the process of grieving and these feelings are completely valid. Here are a few actions you can take to cope with your grief.

◆ **REST AND RECUPERATE:** You have been under a tremendous psychological strain and you need time to think about your personal needs and wants. Having put another's needs first always, constantly worrying about medical issues, and putting many aspects of your life on hold has been the norm, but now that needs to change.

Self-care and self-love are now on top of your list — a vacation, hobbies, reconnecting with friends — start with experiences that you had put on pause.

◆ **SPEAK WITH A THERAPIST:** There is no shame in asking for help to deal with grief. Connect with a counsellor and try out a few sessions. Talking with an unbiased, non-judgemental audience is sometimes exactly what you need.

◆ **WRITE A LETTER:** Pen down all your feelings, positive or negative, and ask for forgiveness in the letter. Make it as detailed as you want — add memories with her that made you happy, conversations or actions you regret, things you wanted to share with her that you couldn't. Once written, find a quiet place, read it out loud in front of her picture, say sorry for all the things you want to apologise for, and then put the letter away.

◆ **CREATE A MEMORY BOARD:** To shift your focus to more positive thoughts, make a board using both of your favourite colours, moments, things, quotes, films, songs, holidays, people and more. Keep it in the room where she stayed, or her favourite place in your house and spend 10-15 minutes in front of it, reflecting on all the happy memories you shared.

There are five stages of grief — denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance — and everyone goes through these in different timelines. While some may take months, others may take years. Do not beat yourself up. Start the process of forgiving yourself so you can start healing.

Q: I'm a 43-year-old working woman. I lost my husband at 29 and delivered a child after that. My priority has always been my child and I've brought her up single-handedly. I've never neglected my office work and kept the stakeholders happy. However, I have never socialised with colleagues or networked with industry professionals, having believed that my work should do all the talking. It's disheartening to see that one needs advocates to ensure promotions or raises. I feel like I'm taken for granted at work as my bosses know that my personal situation is such that even if they do not promote me, I will work due to financial constraints. Please let me know what should be my approach, because despite all, I love my job.

A: As an empowered woman who has surmounted many difficulties and obstacles to get to where you are today, believe that you have the power to make your presence felt at work. Being taken for granted is never a good feeling at any time, especially when you have been a loyal, productive, and passionate employee. Here are a couple of things you can try:

◆ **UPDATE YOUR RESUME:** If it has been gathering dust in an old folder, it's time to give it a makeover. Incorporate new skills, highlight your achievements, reformat the presentation and edit the language. Turn it into a storytelling tool that shows the journey of your growth.

◆ **SET UP INFORMATIONAL AND ACTUAL INTERVIEWS:** Research the latest in your industry to see if you've been keeping up. This includes identifying thought leaders, successful entrepreneurs and professionals, and organisations

where you would like to work. Reach out to some of them to see if you can find a mentor or a guide or even someone who can share an insight into where your industry is headed in the next five to 10 years. And even if you have no intention of changing jobs, apply to a few to see the response you're getting. And if you do get interviews and eventual offers, you'll have a third person's perspective on how valuable your skills are.

◆ **REBRAND YOURSELF:** You are an asset at your company but you need to show them that you're not just another resource expenditure but an investment.

◆ **TAKE NETWORKING BABY STEPS:** As much as you may dislike it, this is important. You don't need to make best friends at work or constantly gossip at the water cooler, but stop approaching it as a necessary evil. Get a coffee or share lunch with approachable colleagues once a month, and you may even end up making a work friend or two.

◆ **RE-INTERVIEW WITH YOUR BOSS:** Collate all your skill sets, what you're best at, things you do that nobody else can, and more. Ask for a short meeting (15-20 minutes) to discuss your future at the organisation and then



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approach it like a new interview. And at this meeting, you will not only pitch yourself, but also ask your boss to pitch why you should continue to work there, that is, how the organisation can help you achieve your career goals. Speak frankly and if a raise is not on the cards, negotiate perks that make your life easier and cost the company next to nothing.

Doing these may feel scary, but it will help you to not only understand your own

value, but also enable you to get out of your comfort zone. Here's wishing you all the best.

Minu Budhia, a psychotherapist, counsellor, founder of Caring Minds, iCanFly, Cafe iCanFly, and TEDx speaker, answers 12 queries related to mental healthcare and adolescence issues. Send your queries to askminubudhia@caringminds.co.in or t2onsunday@abp.in