



# COPING WITH MS

## WORKSHOP HANDOUT

Living with MS requires coping with loss. Grief is the gut punch you suffer with each new setback, but *mourning* is an active process. Mourning is not pathological; it is an essential part of a normal human existence. Every human inevitably faces the loss of people they love, and we all become unable to do things that we once enjoyed or hoped to enjoy.

Not too many years ago, we spoke of mourning in “stages” as though there was a singular sequential path to “get over it.” Let us view it, instead, as a process that ebbs and flows through what one author identifies as six “needs of mourning.” These are not sequential tasks that will launch you back into the life you imagined, but the framework does help us think about it.

### **1. Acknowledge the reality of your diagnosis and prognosis**

This is best done in doses, bit by bit. It will become real in your head before your heart. You will push away the reality from time to time and that’s okay.

### **2. Embrace the pain of your losses**

The psychic pain of facing a life you did not expect is profound. There is the loss of how you thought your life would unfold and the loss of things you can no longer expect to experience. Not to be confused with “feeling sorry for yourself,” it is important to really feel your pain.

### **3. Remember your past**

Your life did not begin with the diagnosis, and it is not the whole of your life now. It helps to put your losses into perspective. You may want to write down or tell someone else your story, savoring the best parts and noticing the resilience you have demonstrated before.

### **4. Incorporate your limitations into your self-identity**

Your illness is only one aspect of who you are. It does not define you. It takes time to learn to see yourself in a different light than you anticipated, but you are still your most vital self.

### **5. Search for meaning**

“Why me?” “Why now?” People who grew up with religion may have a crisis of faith; those who had no faith may start to search for one. The search can be rich and fulfilling.

### **6. Receive ongoing support from others**

Humans need to both give and receive moral, emotional, and physical support from others.