



Barry,

I am a single man in my 50's. All around me is illness and I am at the point I just want to emotionally check out. I dealt with this during my 30's with the AIDS crisis, and now I have to deal with it again. My mom has Alzheimer's and is getting closer to death. Last year my dad had major health issues, and now, many of my friends are dealing with loved ones with some form of cancer.

I have a brother, who has his own health issues, and the responsibility of his own family. I know if something happens to him, the burden will fall on me. Recently, I am finding that talking to people is becoming a burden, and am starting to emotionally pull away. If there was a cave to crawl into, and come out when it was all over, I would at this point.

I am starting to feel unsympathetic, uncaring, and unemotional to people around me. I feel like I am at the breaking point, and being single does not offer the support others have from a partner. Is this a normal reaction?

Signed Emotionally Tired

Dear Emotionally Tired,

Going thru the AIDS crisis when you were in your 30's, was like being in a war. Having to deal with death of friends and loved ones, in such mass numbers will take a heavy emotional toll. That is not the stage in life to have to deal with so much loss. Now you are at the age, where losing parents or hearing about death and health issues, is normal.

Your ability to cope is fragile. It is one thing to deal with one parent at a time, but both parents can be overwhelming. On top of that, hearing that close friends are dealing with loved ones who have cancer, is beyond the norm.

So, yes, it is normal to at times feel like there is nothing left to give on an emotional level. Unfortunately, one cannot crawl into a cave, and wait for it to be over.

I would talk with your brother and see how he can take some of the family burden off of you. Stop making excuses for him. He is still alive and functioning. As for the stage your mom is in, you have already started the grieving process. Spend time with her, and the rewards will come later. Even though your friends are going thru some of their own challenges, reach out to them for support. If they are good friends, they understand where you are at.

Last, realize that this is life, and there is no avoiding illness and death. That is why emotional support in any form is important, from support groups, individual therapy, to good friends.

Barry