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## Family death five years ago <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

I am a generally happy graduate student here, with family nearby and good friends. However, I wanted to ask if maybe I should try counseling. When I was in my late teens, I had a traumatic family experience (death of a family member). Some months later I entered college, and promptly began to drink like a fish. I don't really know, to this day, how much of it was for fun and companionship and whatever, and how much was to dull the pain of recent events at home. Anyway, I stopped drinking the next year, and have since drunk alcohol with no signs (to me) that I had an alcoholism problem, which was often suggested to me that first year of college.

Now, I am in school, doing what I want, and involved for the last two years with a man I love very much, and who loves me. We are headed for long-term commitment, but I am afraid of wrecking it, because I often feel like I am freaking out and will sometimes cry and become very, very depressed, I think over these events I have mentioned. My guess, unfortunately, is that I have a tendency for melodrama and depression anyway. In which case, I would just try to rein my emotions in and get control of myself. I need some reassurance, I guess.

— Emotion-laden

### **Answer**

Dear Emotion-laden,

It's wonderful that you're doing what you love, are generally happy, and in a relationship with a supportive partner who loves you. But while your life is going well now, and is removed five years from the traumatic event, time and distance alone don't always make hard experiences and emotions disappear. You mention an interest in an objective opinion — spending time with a counselor could provide a helpful perspective for dealing with the intense grief and after-effects of your loss. Some counselors are trained specifically to help people understand and heal from traumatic situations and the accompanying feelings of grief and anxiety that often surface as a result.

It's very common, and in fact healthy, to be deeply sad and affected when someone close to you passes away. But you don't have to grieve alone. It's great that your boyfriend is understanding,

but working with a counselor to process difficult emotions could take some of the pressure off of your relationship, and could help you feel less anxious about "wrecking it" out of depression or anxiety. From what you describe, alcohol played a larger role during your first year than it does now. In addition to helping you cope with your grief, counseling may also offer some insight into your relationship with alcohol. A counselor won't tell you what to do, but will help you determine the answers and solutions that work best for you.

If you think it may be helpful, you can make an appointment with to speak with a mental health professional. It might also be helpful take a look at the linked Q&As which relate to grieving and alcohol use in response to emotional distress.

With hope that insight and support will offer you strength and healing,

Alice!

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