

**Grief: A Normal Response To Loss**

Beginning in childhood, many people are taught to face life's crises with a "stiff upper lip,, to "bear up and be strong,, We often fear that any show of emotion (particularly tears) will be interpreted by others as a sign of weakness. —"He's falling apart,, or "she's going to pieces,,

One of the tragedies in our society today is that many bereaved family members and friends experience their grief alone, feeling "there must be something wrong with me; certainly, no one I know has ever felt or behaved in these strange ways,, Fearful of embarrassment or of appearing "crazy,, to others, many bereaved persons hide their true feelings.

It is important to realize that what you are experiencing in your grief is a normal, natural and expected response to the loss of a significant person in your life. The following are descriptions by bereaved individuals of the grief experience. (Your grief reaction may manifest itself in any one or more of these ways.)

**Physical Aspects of Grief:**

- " ■I feel sick to my stomach...I can't eat,,
- "I have trouble getting to sleep and when I finally do, I sleep only a few hours before I'm up again,,

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**Other Physical Reactions:**

- General weakness and fatigue
- Over sensitivity to noise
- Feeling of emptiness
- Dizziness or headaches
- Nausea
- Heavy feeling in the chest
- Tightness in the throat
- Shortness of breath
- Outburst of sobbing

**1. Mental and Motivational Aspects of Grief:**

- " ■I can't seem to get organized. I'm up and down a hundred times during the day and never accomplish anything,,
- " ■I keep thinking about how it all happened over and over again in my mind. I guess I'm trying to make some sense out of it all,,
- "I think I'm losing my mind. I can't concentrate on anything. I can't even decide what to wear today,,
- "Yesterday I heard my loved one call for me in the night and today I thought I saw him rocking in his chair,,

**Mental Manifestations Include:**

- Lack of initiative ■ Forgetfulness
- Tension and anxiety ■ Feelings of unreality

**Emotional Reactions:**

- " ■If only I had told her one more time, I love you. If only,,,,
- " ■He should have gone to the doctor months ago,,

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- “ ■ The nights and weekends are the worst for me —empty and lonely.,,  
■ “It’s as if anytime now, he’ll call or come walking through the door. I keep thinking of things to tell him.,,

**Other Emotional Reactions:**

- Feelings of anguish
- Guilt
- Resentment
- Isolation
- Depression
- Loneliness
- Anger
- Self-pity
- Abandonment
- Sadness
- Emptiness
- Loss of self-esteem

**Interpersonal Problems:**

“ ■ I thought this would bring us closer together...instead we constantly bicker. When I’m feeling up he’s depressed. And when he’s up, I’m down.,,

**Other Social Reactions:**

- Tendency to respond to others with anger or adaptability
- Loss of spontaneity

**Spiritual Reactions:**

- “If my faith were stronger, I would be able to handle this.,,
- “ If I really believed, this wouldn’t have happened.,,

**Other Spiritual Reactions:**

- Anger with God ■ Doubts about the reality of God’s existence ■ Questioning, “Why did this happen?., ■ Questioning the meaning of life

Grief is a very unique and individual experience. Although there are many common expressions of feelings that we each may share with others who have gone through similar losses, each of us journey through grief in our own way. If you would like to talk to a grief counselor, please call the Hospice office. We are here to offer you support and guidance during this difficult time.

**Needs of the Bereaved**

**Time:** You still need time alone with others whom you trust and who will listen when you need to talk...months and years of time to feel and understand the feelings that go along with loss.

**Rest, Relaxation, Exercise, Nourishment, Diversion:** You may need extra amounts of things you needed before—hot baths, afternoon naps, a trip, a “cause., to draw you out of your

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mourning. Grief is an exhausting emotional process. You need to replenish yourself. Follow what feels healing to you and what connects you to the people and things you love.

**Security:** Get help on things that are stressful (e.g., financial matters, parenting, etc.). Let yourself be close to those you trust. Getting back into a routine helps. You may need to let yourself do things at your own pace.

**Hope:** You may find hope and comfort from those who have experienced a similar loss. Knowing what helped them and realizing that they have recovered can help give you hope that your grief, too, will become less raw and painful.

**Caring:** Try to let yourself accept expressions of caring from others, even though they may at times feel awkward. Helping a friend or relative who is suffering the same loss may bring a feeling of closeness with that person.

**Goals:** For a while, it will seem that much of life is without meaning. At times like these, small goals are helpful. Something to look forward to—like playing tennis with a friend next week, a movie tomorrow night, a trip next month—helps you get through the immediate future. Living one day at a time is a rule of thumb. At first, don't be surprised if your enjoyment of these things is not the same. This is normal. As time passes, you may need to work on some longer-range goals to give some structure and direction to your life. Counseling may help with this.

**Small Pleasures:** Do not underestimate the healing of small pleasures—sunsets, a walk in the woods, a favorite food, etc. Little things like these can be small steps toward regaining your pleasure in life itself.

**Permission to Backslide:** Sometimes after a period of feeling good, we find ourselves back in the old feelings of extreme sadness, despair or anger. This is often the nature of grief, and it may happen over and over for a while. It happens because we, as humans, cannot take in all the pain and meaning of death at once. We let it in a little at a time, and with each new step in awareness, we re-experience fresh pain.

### **What is NOT helpful..**

**Drugs:** Even medication used to help people get through periods of shock under a physician's guidance may prolong and delay the necessary process of grieving. We cannot prevent or cure grief. The only way out is through.