

What is Grief?

- The pain felt in response to the death of a loved one
- A normal response to loss
- Unique to each person —individuals grieve differently
- A process without a timeline or linear stages
- NOT a sign of weakness, a disorder, or a disease
- A process filled with highs and lows; sometimes described as “waves”

Grief can affect every level of functioning:

Physically:

Crying
Change in sleep pattern
Headaches
Stomachaches/nausea
Appetite changes
Weight gain/loss
Energy loss or hyperactivity

Spiritually:

Loss or questioning of faith
Anger at God
Searching for life’s meaning
Strengthened or renewed faith
Increased sense of connection
with the one who has died

Mentally:

Inability to concentrate/focus
Confusion and forgetfulness
Disorganized
Difficulty with decision-making
Denial/disbelief
Preoccupation with the death
Loss of hope/may not want to go on living
Remembering only the good qualities
of the one who has died

Emotionally:

Anger (at the person/medical
system/person responsible)
Numbness
Shock
Guilt
Loneliness
Sadness
Regret
Shame (if the death involved
crime, drugs, or suicide)
Relief (after long illness)

Socially:

Sense of isolation/withdrawal
Change in peer relationships

Importance of Self-Care on Your Grief Journey

Grief can be experienced in many different ways, in varying degrees--emotionally, physically, cognitively, psychologically, and spiritually. Reactions to a loss can include symptoms such as fatigue, changes in sleep patterns and/or appetite, difficulties with concentration and memory, mood fluctuations, and even hopelessness. The stressors related to grief can be exhausting and overwhelming, but are often normal reactions to the death of a loved one.

Although there is no short cut to healing, there are things that we can do to take care of ourselves, that can help us get through each day.

- Accept your feelings. There is no “right” way to feel. Anger, fear, loneliness, and guilt are just a few of the feelings that may arise and are a normal response grief. Whenever you are able, acknowledge and share these feelings with others. Avoiding or stifling feelings often result in complications down the road.
- Be gentle with yourself. You are allowed to make mistakes, feel angry, sad, guilty and have bad days.
- Identify people in your life that are positive supports and make time to spend with them.
- Make a list of what you feel guilty about. Consider areas where you can make amends and acknowledge ones that you are powerless to change.
- Take the time to think about joyful moments in your relationship with your loved one...share stories with others and have them share happy memories with you.
- Pay attention to your physical needs. It is easy to neglect your basic physical needs at this time. It can be a struggle to eat, sleep, or get out of bed, let alone get fresh air or exercise. Although difficult, it is vital to make sure that you are taking good care of yourself.
- The simplest of life tasks can be very overwhelming. Prioritize your life, responsibilities, and time. It’s ok to say “no” to low priority items.
- Break a task into small, manageable pieces. Set small, attainable goals. Create “to-do” lists.
- When making it through each day feels overwhelming, try looking at it in small segments at a time, from one hour to the next, or one moment to the next.
- Start a gratitude journal and write down aspects of your life in which you feel grateful. This could be difficult to identify in the midst of grief, but it is important to search for things that bring you hope.
- Accept help from others. We may not want to feel a burden to those around us, or admit that we need support, but the people around us that care genuinely want to be helpful, they may just not know what to offer.
- Allow yourself to have moments of joy and to “take a break” from your grief.