



Understanding Your Grief

Grief, with its many ups and downs, lasts far longer than society in general recognizes. Be patient with yourself.

Each person's grief is individual. You and every other person will experience it and cope with it differently.

Crying is an acceptable and healthy expression of grief and releases built up tensions for mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters, friends, and often business associates. Cry freely as you feel the need.

Physical reactions to death may include the loss of appetite or overeating, sleeplessness, and sexual difficulties. You may find that you have very little energy and cannot concentrate. A balanced diet, rest, and moderate exercise are especially important at this time.

You may feel you have nothing to live for and may think about a release from this intense pain. Be assured that many people feel this way, but a sense of purpose and meaning does return. The pain does lessen.

Guilt, real or imagined, is a normal part of grief. It surfaces in thoughts and feelings of "if only." In order to resolve this guilt, learn to express and share these feelings, and learn to forgive yourself.

Anger is another common reaction to loss. Anger, like guilt, needs expression and sharing in a healthy and acceptable manner.

Death often causes people to challenge and examine their faith and philosophy of life. Don't be disturbed if you are questioning your own beliefs. Talk about it. For many, faith offers help to accept the unacceptable.

Avoid the use of drugs and alcohol. Medications should be taken sparingly and only under the supervision of your physician. Many substances are addictive and can lead to chemical dependence. In addition, they may stop or delay the grieving process.

Friends and relatives may be uncomfortable around you. They want to ease your pain but do not know how. Take the initiative and help them learn how to be supportive to you. Talk about your loss so they know this is appropriate.

Whenever possible, put off major decisions (changing residence, changing jobs, etcetera) for at least a year.

Avoid making hasty decisions about belongings. Do not allow others to take over or rush you. You can do it little by little whenever you feel ready.

Children are often the forgotten grievers within a family. They are experiencing many of the same emotions you are, so share thoughts and tears with them. Though it is a painful time, be sure they feel loved and included.

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Holidays and the anniversaries of a person's birth and death can be stressful times. Consider the feelings of the entire family in planning how to spend the day. Allow time and space for your own emotional needs.

It may help to become involved with groups of people having similar experiences: sharing eases loneliness and promotes the expression of your grief in an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding.

Bereaved individuals and their families can find healing and hope for the future as they reorganize their lives in a positive way.

From "Understanding Grief" by the Compassionate Friends, Inc.

Variables in the Grieving Process

There are many variables in the ways we grieve. The following factors may affect the grief process.

Age makes a difference in our ability to understand death, dying, the future, and problems created by the death.

Men may grieve quite differently than women due to stereotypical roles or social expectations.

Cultural background may provide different rituals and expectations of how one is expected to grieve.

Families vary in their ability and willingness to talk about death and issues surrounding death.

Poor physical health can deplete emotional energy and make the grieving process more difficult.

Lack of an opportunity to say goodbye and complete unfinished business can prolong the grieving process.

The nature of the death, for example if it was sudden or expected, may be a factor. If the death was a suicide or a homicide, many unanswered questions remain in addition to feelings of fear, guilt, and anger.

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