

Dealing With Grief

A Guide to Understanding Your Reactions

When someone important to you dies, you grieve. This means that you may experience a wide range of responses, often over an extended period of time. The following three sections generally coincide with early, middle and later grief, though variation and overlap of these phases is common.

When a death occurs

As you accept the fact of the death of someone important, you will feel shock, numbness and disbelief that this has happened. Panic and strong physical and emotional reactions are common.

Adjusting to loss

Later, as the numbness subsides, you will deal with what this loss means to you and the emotional pain of grieving. The intensity of feeling may surprise or frighten you, but it is natural and can be resolved as you move through it.

As life goes on

As you adjust to life without the person who died, you will begin to re-establish connections with the world around you. You have more energy for family and friends, work and other interests.

Grief may be somewhat familiar, or it may be a new, uncertain endeavour. It is not an easy journey and there may be times when you want more support than is available through your social network. Please do not hesitate to call Bereavement Services at Victoria Hospice.

The Grief Journey

When a death occurs

Walking the Edges

Social

Withdrawal from others

Unrealistic expectations of self and others

Poor judgement about relationships

Physical

Shortness of breath and palpitations

Digestive upsets

Low energy, weakness and restlessness

Emotional

Crying, sobbing and wailing

Indifference and emptiness

Outrage and helplessness

Mental

Confusion, forgetfulness and poor concentration

Denial and daydreaming

Constant thoughts about the person who died and/or the death

Spiritual

Blaming God or life

Lack of meaning, direction or hope

Wanting to die or join the person who died

What Helps

- To pace yourself moment to moment
- To make no unnecessary changes
- To talk about the person and the death
- To use practical and emotional supports

Adjusting to loss

Entering the Depths

Social

Rushing into new relationships

Wanting company but unable to ask

Continued withdrawal and isolation

Self-consciousness

Physical

Changes in appetite and sleep patterns

Shortness of breath and palpitations

Digestive upsets

Emotional

Intense and conflicting emotions

Magnified fear for self or others

Anger, sadness, guilt, depression

Mental

Sense of going crazy

Memory problems

Difficult to concentrate/understand

Vivid dreams or nightmares

Spiritual

Trying to contact the person who died

Sensing the presence of the person who died; visitations

Continued lack of meaning

What Helps

- To recognize and express emotions
- To acknowledge changes
- To understand grief and know others experience similar responses

As life goes on

Mending the Heart

Social

More interest in daily affairs of self/others

Ability to reach out and meet others

Energy for social visits and events

Physical

Physical symptoms subside

Sleep pattern and appetites are more settled

Gut-wrenching emptiness lightens

Emotional

Emotions are less intense

Feeling of coming out of the fog

More peace; less guilt

Mental

Increased perspective about the death
Ability to remember with less pain
Improved concentration and memory
Dreams and nightmares decrease

Spiritual

Reconnection with religious/spiritual beliefs
Life has new meaning and purpose
Acceptance of death as part of life cycle

What Helps

- To reflect on progress since the death
- To begin envisioning a future
- To engage in new activities
- To establish new roles and relationships

Adapted from: Grief, Dying and Death by T. Rando

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