

# Living Through Grief

## **Feelings of Grief**

Grief brings up many different emotions, which can be overwhelming, scary and stressful. The purpose of this publication is to describe some of the feelings of grief and offer suggestions for coping with them. A suggested reading list and work sheet are also included.

## **Identifying Your Feelings**

Death is a natural process in life. But no one is ready for the flood of thoughts and emotions that can overwhelm you after a loved one dies. These emotions are a normal response to the death of a loved one. It is important to allow yourself to feel those emotions so you can move through your grief. Many of the thoughts and feelings you may experience are described below and on the following pages.

## **Confusion**

Do the simplest decisions seem impossible? It is difficult to concentrate and follow through on things? Do you feel disorganized and make many mistakes? Confusion comes because you are using all your emotional energy to grieve and very little is left over for anything else. Remember some confusion is normal.

## **Sadness**

You miss your loved one. You may be unhappy, distressed or heartbroken. Sadness is a normal part of grief.

## **Anxiety/Panic**

Are you afraid of being alone? Do you worry about the future and fear that something else will happen to another loved one? So you think you are "GOING CRAZY"? Panic is normal. Coping Tip: Talking about your feelings, crying, or getting active with something may help to lessen the "panicky" feelings.

## **Depression**

Depression is common in those who are grieving. It hurts so much. Sometimes you just don't care about anything. It takes effort to get out of bed, shop, or fix a simple meal. Coping Tip: It is important to talk things over with a friend or someone who will listen. If these feelings are prolonged over several months and experienced every day, it would be wise to seek a Bereavement Counselor.

## **Preoccupation**

Your loved one who has died may be in your thoughts constantly. You may think of nothing but the loss. You may even dream of your loved one or be focused on his or her face. Coping Tip: You might try to keep a journal of your thoughts during this time. You will notice these thoughts will lessen over time.

## **Guilt**

Many people are tortured by “if only” and “what if”. We tend to blame ourselves for things we wish we had done differently for our loved one. Thoughts of guilt are normal but often not helpful. Coping Tip: It is best not to push down the guilt. Talk about it until you can let it go. In time, you will realize you did the best you could.

## **Anger**

Anger is a very common emotion during grief. You may be angry with yourself or with others, with the person who died or with God. You may also feel anger toward people who push you to accept our loss too soon or who pretend that nothing has happened.

Pushing down anger is harmful because it can resurface in physical problems such as ulcers, high blood pressure or depression. Your anger will come out one way or another and may be directed at innocent people and unrelated events. It is often hard to admit and may be directed at innocent people and unrelated events. It is often hard to admit to being angry. Coping Tip: It is helpful to find ways to let out your anger, such as screaming in private place, walking, swimming, or some form of physical exercise.

## **Loneliness**

After the funeral, relatives and friends may go on with their own lives, leaving you to deal alone with your grief. Co-workers, friends, neighbors, and sometimes even family members may avoid you or change the subject. Some people withdraw because they are hurt and do not know how to help. Coping Tip: Support groups can be helpful.

## **Despair**

“How can I go on?” You may come to the point where the agony seems too much. You cannot bear it. You think you will not be able to survive. Coping Tip: It may be helpful to talk to someone who has made it through grief, or to read about grief. There are many personal accounts of how individuals survived the loss of a loved one.

## **Helplessness**

“What am I going to do?” You may feel helpless about your feelings, your grief. You may feel unable to help yourself cope or get better. You may feel unable to help other family members. You may feel self-pity. Although you know you had no control over what happened, you may feel powerless at not having been able to prevent it. Coping Tip: While life may seem out of control, healing is not a passive event. Grief is hard work. Take small steps to re-build your life.

## **Envy**

You may feel jealous of people who still have their loved ones to enjoy. Coping Tip: Try to take time to let family members and friends who are a source of support know how much you appreciate their help.

## **Frustration**

Many frustrations are a part of grief. “Why am I feeling so upset for so long?” You may become disappointed with yourself that you are not coping as well as you think you should. Coping Tip: Try to find ways to release your frustration, by calling a friend, writing in a journal or going for a walk.

## **Bitterness**

Some bereaved people feel bitterness toward those whom they feel are responsible for their loved one’s death. Coping Tip: These bitter feelings should be worked on or the bitterness could last for many years. Bitterness drains you of energy.

## **Relief (Laughter)**

Enjoy the relief that comes with laughter because the grief will return soon enough. You are not being disloyal to your loved one when you enjoy life. Coping Tip: Sometimes it helps to see a comedy movie or video. Or you might talk about the amusing times you had with your loved one.

### **The Feeling of Falling Apart**

When a loved one dies, feelings of irrationality and absurdity can bombard you. You may feel overwhelmed. Decision-making is difficult; communicating with others is strenuous. You may feel clumsy. Completing routine tasks seem nearly impossible. Disorganization and confusion may best describe your life.

Grieving has a way of tearing you down emotionally and physically. All of this is temporary. Even though this is a new experience, you will work through this pain.

### **A Healing Thought:**

By living one day at a time, you discover simple ways to cope with devastating times.

### **Thinking about Grief**

These are some of the ways my grief is affecting me:

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### **Suggested Reading List**

Don't Take My Grief Away

By Doug Manning

Insight Books, 1979

The Journey Through Grief

By Alan Wolfelt

Companion Press, 1997

The Path Through Grief

By Marguerite Bouvard

Breitenbush Books, 1988