

HOSPICE FOUNDATION OF AMERICA

HOSPICE INFORMATION CENTER

for families, friends and professionals

funded by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GRIEF

Grief is a Normal Reaction to Loss

A common question you may have is: am I okay? Be assured that your experience of grief is normal. You're not going crazy; you are grieving. Each of us is affected by grief in our own way.

There May Be Danger Signs with Grief

When we behave in self-destructive ways - if we're suicidal, if we're abusing substances such as drugs or alcohol, or we are being destructive to others--it is important to seek professional help. Many hospices have support groups or provide referral to resources. Physicians, clergy and even funeral directors can be excellent resources as well.

Grief is Not a Predictable Set of Stages

Most of us experience grief like a rollercoaster: there are ups and downs, good days and bad days. And like a rollercoaster, the beginning of the ride is not the worst part. There are no universal stages of grief; each of us has our own personal pathway as we experience loss. Grief can affect us now and years from now.

We Continue a Bond

For most people, the pain of grief does lessen over time. But we never forget about the person who died. We continue a bond that always lasts. Sometimes we're afraid that if we let go of grief we'll let go of that connection. But death can never end that; we stay connected.

Grief Affects Us in Many Ways.

We may experience grief physically, emotionally, and spiritually. If grief physically hurts, talk to a doctor and remind him or her of your loss. Emotions like sadness, loneliness, guilt, or worry are normal parts of grief. Spiritually, we may be angry at God or alienated from our beliefs. Conversely, we may grow more dependent on our faith.

Rituals Can Help

Funerals, memorials, and other rituals can be important ways to acknowledge loss and experience our emotions. Some may be helped by freely talking about the loss in a support group or with trusted friends. Some of us may need to say a final goodbye or a final “I love you.”

A Person’s Death can Bring About Other Losses

One mother found that as she dealt with the death of her 19-year-old son, she also felt that she lost a connection with many of his friends. After a long caregiving experience, some people need to redefine who they are, as they have lost that role as caregiver and partner.

Planning Ahead can Help.

Some days like birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays may be especially difficult. We may need a plan to cope. The “three C’s” can be useful: Choose how you want to spend the day. Communicate those choices to the people around you. Compromise if necessary, especially if the plans involve other family members who may also be grieving.

Choose How to Adjust to Life after Loss.

While you didn’t have any choice about losing your loved one, you do have choices: What do you wish to take from your old life into your new life? What memories do you want to take with you? What do you wish to leave behind? As you live your now-changed life, what new skills and insights do you need to add?

You Don’t Have to Do this Alone.

Grief is hard work, but we don’t need to do it alone. Libraries and bookstores offer a range of self-help books. Support groups may be helpful. Activities such as journaling, drawing, or making a video montage or photo book can offer comfort. Professional counselors can also offer great support.

We can emerge from this journey and find a life with new satisfactions and joys, while always keeping a connection to the person we loved.

For more information on hospice, grief and bereavement, or caregiving and end-of-life issues, please visit our website at www.hospicefoundation.org/hfacares or call us at: **800-854-3402**.



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