

GRIEF

A PERSONAL JOURNEY



Faith
Hospice™



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The only way through grief is forward, with many turns and going back and forth over what seems like the same territory. We journey to the center of our grief, to the center of ourselves, and then we slowly return to reenter the world.

Each person's experience on the journey of grief will be different. This is a reflection of our personal style, our relationship with the person who died, our internal and social resources, and our past history of coping. As you journey through your own grief process, there will likely be unexpected turns and insights.

THE GRIEF JOURNEY

WHEN A DEATH OCCURS – WALKING THE EDGES

In the beginning phase of grief, you come to accept the reality of the death. The loss and your grief are your primary experience at this time.

You may experience a sense of unreality. You may be shocked at the news of the death and feel bewildered or stunned. This may be a time when you need care and assistance with practical tasks.

You know intellectually that the death has occurred but may find that you have moments of denial when you think or feel as if it has not really happened. Denial is nature's way of giving you breaks from hard truths. You are able to take things in at your own pace. To know in your heart and in your experience that the person is gone takes time.

Numbness may allow you to do the things that are necessary, such as making arrangements for the funeral, informing others of the death, etc. People may interpret this as strength and coping, and be surprised when you do express feelings of distress.

ADJUSTING TO LOSS – ENTERING THE DEPTHS

The middle phase of grief may last for an extended time, with good days and bad days, episodes of intense grief, and times when you are feeling more like your usual self. Some people describe their grief as coming in waves. Others think of their good days as "holidays from grief". Your grief is a central focus in your life at this time.

This is the phase in which you are coming to terms with the meaning of this loss in your life. You may be reviewing your relationship with the person who died, throughout the time you knew each other. You will think about all the ups and downs, and may experience feelings of regret or guilt.



Your personal response to the loss may include a range of emotions such as anger, depression, and loneliness. The intensity of these feelings can be unexpected and overwhelming. Your values, beliefs, or faith may be challenged by the ways in which your world has changed. It is beneficial to find ways to express and sort through these responses. Talking to a trusted person, keeping a journal, working on albums or family histories, finding safe outlets for emotions, and attending to taking care of yourself are some positive ways to help yourself.

Emotional pain can bring physical distress. This pain is real, not imagined, as your body is reacting to your emotions. Heartache is a very real sensation. Chest pain is quite common among bereaved people. You may find that your normal patterns of eating and sleeping are altered. Any problems or worries should be checked with your doctor. Make sure that your doctor knows about your bereavement so that he or she can advise you appropriately.

This is a time when your social support network may be changing. People may expect you to feel better than you do. You may not find the support that you want. The company of other bereaved people may be very comforting to you as they can understand much of your experience.

AS LIFE GOES ON – MENDING THE HEART

At some point in your grief, you will be aware that your loss is becoming a part of your past experience. You may feel some pangs of guilt that your life is continuing to move forward. It is helpful at this time to review how far you have come since the death occurred and to recall your earlier experiences of grief.

The good days outnumber the bad days more and more. Mostly, you are able to remember things about the person with a sense of comfort. Your grief is not over, as there very likely will be times when you will intensely miss the person who died. These times may be related to significant life events that you would have shared with them.

It is important to be able to find meaningful ways to include the person who died as an important part of your life now. You need ways to remember and honor them, and to talk about them in a natural and comfortable way.

This may be a time of personal integration when you reevaluate your life and make significant personal choices that enhance the quality of your life. You may want to acknowledge the personal growth that has come as a result of surviving, and continuing to survive, this loss.

METAPHORS FOR GRIEF

Grief may be compared to a journey, a road that we must travel between how things were and how they will be. The labyrinth is an ancient image of an interior journey that moves inward to central issues of meaning; it is an image of wholeness. The labyrinth journey is a metaphor for grief as there is only one way to go - forward.

Despite the many twists and turns, even when the next part of the journey cannot be seen, the way is onward. There are no dead-ends and wrong turns. The way leads to the center and then returns. Grief is also like any significant journey, for the traveler is changed by his or her experiences along the way and the once familiar world is different on the traveler's return.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH GRIEF

Grief is the natural variety of responses that you experience when someone important to you dies. It affects you in many ways: socially, physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. The death of someone important upsets your relationships, your daily life, and your ideas about how the world works. Grief is the process by which you cope with the significance of this loss, begin to adjust to the changes in your life, and make some order out of the chaos that has resulted from the death.

Each of you has particular strengths and coping mechanisms that



have helped you to deal with other times of distress. You have a network of family, friends, and acquaintances on whom you count for help and support. Most often these resources will be sufficient to sustain and encourage you through your grief.

Your experience of grief will be influenced by your personal, familial, and cultural style, and your relationship with the person who died. You may be aware that this current grief feels quite different from another grief that you have experienced. The effect and meaning of this loss is unique.

**May your journey lead you to the center and back.
May you be blessed with companions on your journey.**

DEALING WITH GRIEF

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 variations and overlaps of these phases are common.

WHEN A DEATH OCCURS

As you accept 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 readjust to life without the person who died, you will begin to reestablish 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 endeavor. 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 the Bereavement Department at Faith Hospice.

WHEN A DEATH OCCURS – WALKING THE EDGES

SOCIAL

- Withdrawal from others
- Unrealistic expectations of self and others
- Poor judgment 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
- Poor concentration
- Indifference and emptiness
- Outrage and helplessness



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 and 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 patterns 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 the 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

10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT GRIEF

When you are grieving, it helps to know what to expect. Although your grief is unique to your relationship with the person who died, there are some common themes. These 10 things discussed below are important in understanding your grief.

1. GLOBAL EFFECT OF LOSS

The death of someone very close to you can be a life-transforming event that affects all aspects of yourself and your life. It can feel as if your world has been shattered. The grief process is the journey between how things were and how they will be. It is an interior journey, like a labyrinth, moving toward the central issues of meaning.

2. GRIEF IS A NATURAL PROCESS

The grief you feel at the death of someone important to you is the consequence of living and loving, of your meaningful connections with others. Grief is a normal part of life and a natural response to loss. Information about the phases of grief can help you to understand the responses that you experience.

3. INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN GRIEVING STYLES

Although grief has some definable outlines, how you grieve is a unique result of your personality, your past history of loss, and the relationship that you had with the person who died. Each person in your family will grieve in his or her own way and with their own timetable. To cope with their grief, some people will openly express the emotions that they experience, while others will control their thoughts and emotions. Neither of these styles is right or wrong; each can be an effective way through grief.



4. CHILDREN AND GRIEF

Children look to the important adults in their lives to learn how to grieve. They are sensitive to the moods and behaviors of the adults around them and will not talk about their thoughts and feelings of loss unless the adults do. Children are frightened by what they do not know or understand, so simple information about death and grief is helpful to them.

5. SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AND SUPPORT

When you are grieving, you want and need support from others – now more than ever. Due to awkwardness or their own feelings of grief, some people may not be able to provide the understanding and caring that you expected from them. Because all of the relationships in your life will be altered in some way after a major loss, it is normal to look at, change, or sometimes end certain relationships. You may find that the company of other bereaved people is particularly comforting.

6. EXPERIENCES YOU MIGHT HAVE IN GRIEF

When you are actively grieving, you can feel very different from your usual self as your emotions, your mind, and your reactions seem unreliable. It is possible that you are feeling intense pain and emotions that you have never felt before. You are not going crazy; this is a natural part of grief. Responses such as fatigue, forgetfulness, and irritability result from your attention and energy being directed toward your grief and adjustment to loss.

7. FLUCTUATIONS IN THE GRIEF PROCESS

As you journey along the path of grief, you will find that your feelings and responses vary at different times and phases of the process. There will be unpredictable ups and downs that may be felt as waves of grief or as good days and bad days. It is important to understand and value the good days as breaks or rests in your particular journey.

8. SELF-CARE AND WHAT HELPS

There are things that you can do to help yourself at this challenging time. Getting information about grief can help you understand your responses and your journey. Be gentle and patient with yourself as you grieve. Do what you can to keep some normal routine for health and social contact. Support may come from a variety of sources: family, friends, bereavement groups, chat rooms, etc. If you are concerned about yourself and your grief, seek professional counseling help.

9. TIME FOR GRIEF

Despite what you may hear about “getting over it” or “the first year,” there are no time lines for grief; it takes as long as it takes. Often your grief journey is longer than you or other people expected, and you may feel pressure to be better than you are by now — whenever this is. It is certain that this loss will continue to be part of your life and that you will always have times when you think about, miss, and grieve for the person who died.

10. GRIEF AS A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY OF HEALING

The death of someone significant in your life brings change that puts you on a different life path. Nothing will ever be the same, yet you must somehow go on and find meaning in the new path before you. As the journey continues, you may experience healing and personal growth as a result of the suffering you have endured and the lessons that you have learned about what you truly value.



COPING WITH CHALLENGES

The death of someone important to you brings many changes in your life. As you are adjusting and responding to these changes, there are challenges you will have to face. These could be about the death, and circumstances at the time, or about your grief and how you are coping. Here are some explanations and practical suggestions regarding common challenges.

DECISION-MAKING

Decision-making can be difficult when you are grieving. This is especially true when your partner has died and you do not have the usual person there to discuss plans, share decisions, and consider consequences. Your memory, concentration, and perspective may be affected by grief, leaving you with little confidence at this time.

Postpone major decisions, if you can, until you are feeling better able to handle them. If you must make major decisions, consult with an objective professional. The following guidelines may help you tackle decision-making:

- Identify the problem and your goal precisely.
- List a variety of solutions – as many as you can think of.
- Outline the steps necessary for each solution.
- Consult an expert or trusted adviser who can be objective.
- Review all the information gathered, looking for oversight.
- Make your choice.
- Follow through step-by-step.

FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

Settling the estate can be a complex and exhausting task. Learning unfamiliar skills for dealing with financial affairs can be overwhelming when you are actively grieving. You may need or want help with paying bills, investing money, and planning your financial future.

Hopefully, you will not have any dealings with disreputable individuals or anyone who will take advantage of your vulnerability. Be cautious, and take your time about all financial decisions, following the suggestions below:

- Legal advice and assistance may be helpful with the estate or other issues.
- Ask your bank for help.
- Seek the services of a qualified accountant/financial planner.
- Always use a well-respected individual or firm.

Before making any major decisions or investments, even with known individuals, check your plans with your bank, your lawyer, or the Better Business Bureau.

PERSONAL EFFECTS

Dealing with the personal belongings of the person who died can be very emotional. You may want to delay it because you do not have the energy, you are not up to the decisions, or you are comforted by the familiar presence. There is no particular time when this must be done, so do it when you feel ready. Doing it a bit at a time may make it manageable. Here are some helpful hints:

- Ask for help from a friend or family member.
- Sort things into categories: things to keep, things for family and friends, things for sale or charity, things to decide about later; repeat if necessary.



MEMORIES OF RECENT EVENTS

Particularly in the early days of grief, you may find that you are frequently thinking about the circumstances of the illness and death. Recurring thoughts, about how the person looked or acted, about the care given, about what you and others did or didn't do, about how you heard the news, are all common and natural. Repetition seems to help us come to terms with difficult or stressful times. Although these memories are pervasive now, memories of other times will return. The following strategies may help you with coping:

- Go over the memories as often as you need to.
- Talk to someone about your thoughts.
- Get the information you need to understand what happened.

CERTAIN ROOMS AND PLACES

There may be certain rooms or places that you wish to avoid as they are associated with the death or the person who died. The courage required to face these places may return of its own accord. However, if your discomfort is intense and is interfering with your day-to-day life, you may wish to seek counseling help. The following strategies may help with coping:

- At home, sleep or eat elsewhere for a while, or rearrange the furniture.
- Away from home, if you need to go somewhere that is uncomfortable, get someone to accompany you or meet you.

CHANGES IN RELATIONSHIPS

You may find that other people have changed the way they relate to you since the death. Their attitudes, responses, and expectations may be different. They may not be as understanding and supportive of your grief as you would like.

Your own needs and responses may have changed also. Your energy

for and interest in social activities may be limited. Loneliness and longing may affect your comfort and composure in social situations. Some suggestions for finding the support that you want are offered here:

- Spend time with people who are comfortable and welcoming.
- Let people know what helps you (small groups, familiar people, quiet activities, etc.).
- Consider support groups for bereaved people.

SPECIAL DATES AND EVENTS

The calendar is full of reminders of the person who died. Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, etc., will be times of missing and thinking of the person, especially during the first year. Planning ahead about how you want to acknowledge these times can be helpful. Give yourself permission to do things differently, and review the suggestions given here:

- Do what feels best for you at the time.
- Be alone, or be with others.
- Go to the gravesite or another place where you feel close to the person who died.
- Find ways to honor your memories: work on a memorial album or journal.

DREAMS AND VISITATIONS

Many people have vivid dreams about the person who died, or hear, see, or feel their presence. Often this is comforting, but occasionally it is not. You may be shy to share these experiences with others, but it is important to believe that your experience is real.

Although grief experts say that the majority of bereaved people have these experiences, some people long for a sense of presence



and do not have it. Some helpful strategies are listed below:

- If you are distressed about a dream or visitation, talk to a counselor or a spiritual adviser.
- Keep a journal or diary of your thoughts, dreams, and experiences.
- Talk to a trusted friend.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR HEALTH

When you are grieving, your eating and sleeping patterns may change, as well as your general health. Fluctuations in energy are often part of grieving. Grief increases your risk for illness due to stress, fatigue, poor nutrition, indifference, etc. There is also a tendency to return to old patterns of coping, some of which may be detrimental to physical well-being, as this can influence emotional healing after a loss. The following points are important to remember:

- Have regular checkups, and consult your doctor about any problems.
- Be careful of medications and alcohol as they mask — rather than deal with the pain.
- Low energy is to be expected; pace your activities and responsibilities.
- Get regular exercise.

SLEEP

Many bereaved people, though they feel exhausted, have trouble going to sleep or staying asleep through the night. Others find that they sleep more — to avoid the pain or due to exhaustion. Some helpful hints for sleeping are included here:

- Give yourself permission to sleep differently for a while.
- Hot milk or herbal tea may help you get to sleep; sleeping pills can be a temporary or occasional assist.
- Avoid stimulations (alcohol, coffee, television, exercise) prior to bedtime; take time to unwind with a bath, relaxation exercises, light reading, or gentle music.

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- Use a pillow or stuffed animal for comfort, to hold or rest behind your back.
- Don't force sleep; count sheep, recall a pleasant time in every detail, plan a trip or renovations, plot a novel.
- If unsuccessful getting to sleep or returning to sleep, after 30 minutes, get up and do something pleasant and relaxing for a short period.

EATING

Your appetite and eating patterns are likely to change for a while; you may have no appetite or feel constantly hungry. Mealtimes can be difficult reminders of your loss. Food preparation, shopping, and nutritional meal planning may be new skills for you and may be things that highlight your loss. Here are some suggestions for dealing with nutrition and mealtimes:

- If eating alone is difficult, change where you eat or where you sit at the table, accept invitations to meals, or have people in for takeout.
- Try to eat regular, healthy meals; avoid snacking on "junk food".
- Use ready-made nutritionally designed meals from the freezer or deli section; stock up on healthy snacks.
- Consider regular dinner/lunch dates with family or friends, i.e., the first Thursday or every Monday.
- Recreational and seniors centers often have cooking classes, sharing kitchens, etc.



UNDERSTANDING YOUR EMOTIONS

When someone close to you dies, you grieve for them. Your grief is the journey from how things were to how things will be. In this journey, you may experience powerful and possibly unfamiliar emotions.

These emotions are part of the natural process of grieving. Remember that an emotion is neither good or bad, nor right or wrong, it is just an emotion. Emotions are not rational, but they are very real responses. You feel emotions in your solar plexus, your gut, and your heart. This is why expressions like “heartfelt,” “butterflies in my stomach,” and “gut-wrenching” are common. Emotions or feelings can be uncomfortable, but they are not harmful.

You may not be used to feeling the amount of emotion that your grief has triggered. Some manifestations of emotions, such as tears, sighing, or nervous irritation, may be distressing and embarrassing to you. You may also experience deep feelings without outward expression.

In the normal process of grief, you will work through emotions in layers. Perhaps you hope that once you experience an emotion, it is over. Then the next layer shows up. You are not back where you were, but facing a new level of the same emotion.

You might try to control or suppress your feelings with varying degrees of success. You can learn to work with your emotions at least to some degree, so that you are not entirely at their mercy. To begin, take things a little at a time, and deal with each emotion as it comes. Let yourself be in the experience, be curious about it, attend to what it is like in detail, and allow the feelings to move through you and out. With practice, you can choose where, when, and for how long to feel your emotions. They become something you journey with rather than wish to avoid.

ANGER

Anger is a natural reaction to frustration, powerlessness, or injustice. Angry feelings are a natural and healthy response to loss. However, anger is a difficult emotion to accept as it can be powerful and menacing – for you and for others. Socially acceptable ways to express anger are hard to find as it is not “nice” to be angry. You may have other words for anger, saying “I’m upset, frustrated, annoyed, cross, or disappointed.”

Your anger may be justifiable anger. It may have a target. There may be valid reasons for your anger, such as things done or not done, said or not said, by others involved in the care of the person who died or at the time of the death. Your anger may be self-directed and related to your feelings of guilt.

You may experience anger without a target or you may not want to acknowledge the target of your anger if, for example, you are angry at the person who died. This can cause free-floating anger that comes from an internal pressure of intense feelings. You may find it hard to recognize as anger, yet it may show up everywhere and come out in all sorts of distressing ways. You may switch feelings (so that you cry), hold silent grudges (then worry and feel guilty), or explode without warning (overreact).

Sometimes you may use anger as a distraction or protection from feelings that you fear may overwhelm you. This is wrong – it’s just a way to have control. Anger may mask a deep emotion, hurt, or injury that you are not prepared to address.

WHAT HAPPENED

BE SAFE

Take care of yourself and protect others, so that your anger does not become harmful. Learn and practice anger management. Take time out when you feel that you might lose control. Time out means



walking away, literally, from whatever the situation is. Immediately. Say when you will return. You only need a short time to calm yourself.

DEFUSE YOUR ANGER

Let the steam off. Physical activity that includes big muscle movement helps. Sports, such as racket sports, running, or aerobics, are a beneficial release. Repetitive actions are good: hammering, digging in the garden, cooking or baking that require chopping, kneading, or pounding. Find activities in your daily routine that help defuse your anger.

EXPRESS THE FEELINGS

In a safe place, with no judgment, talk out the whole story. Write it or draw it, if this works better for you. Examine the details, and name your feelings. Express these feelings through safe outlets. In an unsent letter, or in an “empty chair” or taped conversation, you can talk to the person you are angry at, and say what you really feel and think. You can destroy the letter or tape afterward. This process may put things back in perspective and help you decide if these are things you need or want to do.

TAKE ACTION

Identify positive steps you can take to redress any wrong you perceive has been done. These might be actual or symbolic actions. For example, you might forward suggestions to someone about how your situation could have been handled better, or you might work to make changes through community service.

RELIEVE YOUR TENSION

Take care of yourself through relaxation; get a massage or spa treatment. Practice prayer or meditation. Talk to people who care about you and are able to hear about your struggles.

THE OTHER SIDE OF ANGER

Within your anger, there is energy for positive action. It arises from the same source as initiative. Personal change and growth require dynamic energy.

GUILT

Most grieving people experience some feelings of guilt. To question yourself and your experience is part of being human. You may feel responsible, whether this is rational or not. Your own perfectionism or your personal history may magnify your sense of guilt.

You are trying to make meaning of something tragic and painful. Guilt arises from the belief that there must be a reason for everything that happens. When you are unable to find the reasons, you might blame yourself as this seems better than having no explanation. Guilt also arises from a vulnerable, self-critical point of view and feelings of helplessness in not being able to change things then or now.

It is natural in grief to relive what happened, especially your part in it, and to ask questions like “what if?” or “why?” and to wonder “if only.” You may have regrets about things done and not done, or said and not said. This can trap you in a downward spiral that feels so powerful and so real.

You may experience legitimate guilt related to things you really are responsible for. There may have been some omission, mistake, or action that resulted in the pain, illness, or death. It may be something as ordinary as being a caregiver who was exhausted, lost patience, and was cranky. It may be something as terrible as having been the driver in a fatal car accident. If you had an ambivalent relationship with the person who died, you may have wished him or her dead or harbored ill will against them.

Your guilt may be based in negative judgments of yourself and your perfectionism. You may have judgments about how you are grieving. For example, you may feel guilty about the euphoria or relief you felt at the



time of the death. You may tell yourself “if I were a better person — bad things wouldn’t happen — I would never make a mistake — I wouldn’t feel so bad — I wouldn’t be weak and grieving.” Feelings of guilt are often related to ideas about how you should be. Perhaps you tell yourself that you should be strong, should remember the good times and be happy, should not feel sad. Often these “shoulds” are echoed in the advice of your family and social circle.

WHAT HELPS

EXAMINE YOUR GUILT

Pay attention to what you say to yourself and about yourself. Describe what you feel guilty about and examine it. Look at what you are guilty of — the real part — and decide what you need to do about this.

FORGIVE YOURSELF

Guilt can feel like glue, holding you in an uncomfortable place. Forgiveness is the solvent that loosens this up. Practice self-forgiveness by identifying what you can forgive yourself for and what parts of your guilt you can let go of. There may be parts that you are not ready to let go of yet.

GET A REALITY CHECK

Talk to a trusted person for a reality check. This may help you to separate the real from the groundless guilt.

TAKE ACTION

You may need to do penance for things you judge yourself guilty of. Consider making amends, rather than punishing yourself, and remember, once the price is paid, that’s it. How could you pay the price? Perhaps through charitable works, positive action, or a change in behavior. Plan what needs to happen, what actions or steps you need to take, or which person you need to talk to.

REPEAT THE ABOVE AS NECESSARY

It is useful to review your guilt, sorting and letting go as you are ready.

THE OTHER SIDE OF GUILT

Honor your guilt as a teacher of what you believe is right and wrong. In searching for meaning in the midst of your grief, you learn what you want to hold onto and value. You will find that you will grow through this experience.

FEAR AND ANXIETY

Fear and anxiety are very powerful physical sensations that can include rapid, shallow breathing, nervousness and agitation, upset stomach, and heart palpitations. Usually, fear is telling you to avoid or get away from some danger, but when you are grieving, you may get this signal without any real danger present. Your fear may be about the future rather than the present. Fear, anxiety, and especially panic are felt in your body.

If you fear being unable to cope, not knowing how to go on, or what life will be like, you may not want to go out or face new things and new people. You may feel panicked or paralyzed. If you have too much to deal with, your fear can become generalized into nameless dread. An accumulation of fear and stress creates chronic anxiety and possibly panic attacks.

You may be afraid of the intensity of your own emotions and wonder if you are going crazy. You worry about loss of control, thinking that if you begin to express emotion, you won't be able to stop.

Your fear may center on certain persistent thoughts or memories related to the illness or death. This can be a dilemma as you avoid these memories, yet fear that they may be all you have. As you move through your grief process, you will reclaim all your memories again.

It is quite common to fear illness and dying — for yourself and other family members — due to your heightened sense of morality and sensitivity to symptoms.



WHAT HELPS

NAME YOUR FEAR

Stop and focus on your fear and anxiety. This is the beginning of being able to manage them. Explore what causes these feelings for you. A helpful saying: To name it is to tame it. Get information about whatever causes your fear, as knowledge gives you power. If you are suffering from anxiety or panic attacks, ask your doctor for help and advice.

USE PROBLEM-SOLVING STRATEGIES

Start by asking questions like: What do I need to do now? What can I tackle later? Who can help, and what can they do? What resources do I have? Think small, and organize things into bite-size pieces. Review this process to identify what you learned and can use again. As you begin to take some control, you find that your fears begin to lift.

IDENTIFY WHAT SOOTHES YOUR ANXIETY

Notice what increases and decreases your anxiety. Does it help to be alone or with others? Use positive self-talk, for example: “My body is responding to an emergency, and there is NO emergency. I am safe.” Make a list of what to do when you feel panicky and what helps, for example: Call a designated friend; be active – go for a walk, clean the house, exercise; hang onto something – a pillow, teddy bear, an article of clothing belonging to the person who died; do something soothing – a bath, massage, yoga; practice prayer, meditation, or visualization.

BREATHE SLOWLY, EXHALE

Let the sensations of fear or anxiety remind you to breathe slowly and fully. Take a big breath in, and let it out with a sigh.

THE OTHER SIDE OF FEAR AND ANXIETY

You are responding to change and ready for the challenge. There is a similarity between being anxious and being excited – heart rate

up, sweating palms, dry mouth, stomach churning. Rather than tell yourself “I am afraid,” say “I am ready.” Fear is an indicator of being at your edge, where growth can happen.

HOPELESSNESS AND DESPAIR

Hopelessness, despair, meaninglessness, and void are words used to describe the feelings that can emerge as you face the changes in your life that result from your loss. It may be that everything is different, or that all you held dear and true about love or life has disintegrated. You may experience fear and lack of confidence about the future.

This is the central pain of grief. As sadness empties out of you, then hopelessness and despair arise. You may feel there is “no light at the end of the tunnel.” Other images that people have used to describe their hopelessness are: a forest after a forest fire, a barren desert, the dark night of the soul, or an abyss.

You may not be able to find the courage to put your feelings into words when you can’t believe in the future or you have ambivalence about it. Your grief may not be the way you thought it would be. Perhaps you never thought you would feel this way. If you see no point in going on and it’s hard to find purpose, you wonder how you can go on living in these circumstances. Depression, suicidal thoughts, or a longing to have life be over may plague you now.

Hopelessness and despair can come at moments along the way or be a significant portion of your grief journey. These feelings are related to depression, and you and others might call it that. In grief, your mood is variable, and you have moments when you can laugh. In clinical depression, your mood is consistently low, and you are emotionally flat. Your fear may be that it will always be this way, but this is an in-between time — a still place or transition — in which you integrate what has been with what is now. The stillness or emptiness allows you to move into what is to come.



WHAT HELPS

SHARE YOUR AMBIVALENCE

If you are uncertain about how to go on, seek help from your doctor, counselor, or spiritual adviser.

LET OTHERS KNOW AND HELP

If you can, spend time with the generations of family. Identify people who have been through this and survived. These may be people in your own social network or characters in books and movies.

VALUE THIS TIME

This is a time of transition and change. Allow yourself to reflect on where you have been and where you might be heading. Imagine that a seed has been planted in the ground; in the dark, it is preparing to grow.

NURTURE YOURSELF

Pray or meditate regularly. Spend quiet time in nature, and allow the beauty of the world to touch you. Notice the continuation of life's cycles. You may find it helps to keep a journal to record your progress in some way. Remember to value your small accomplishments.

THE OTHER SIDE OF HOPELESSNESS

Recognition of the natural cycles of life can bring you an acceptance of yourself and your process. Being in touch with the beauty of the world can bring peace.

May Sarton wrote, "Help us to be the always hopeful gardeners of the spirit who know that without darkness nothing comes to birth as without light nothing flowers." (The Book of Virtues)

SORROW

Some other words that you might use to describe sorrow include sadness, emptiness, loneliness, and longing. Sorrow is hard to put into words as words never really match your feeling or its depth. It is also hard to talk about, as other people may not be comfortable hearing about your pain. When you do not feel connected or understood, you may feel alone, even in the presence of others.

Sorrow is your sadness for the loss itself. It may be expressed through weeping and crying. Expression of your sorrow may include sobbing and wailing also. The pain of sorrow is heartache. You might say that your heart is broken or that you feel wounded — like being half a person.

Your sorrow is related to the companionship and relationship that you are missing, and to the love and connection you felt with the person. You may want the person back, want the relationship to continue, want someone to love and care for, who loves you in return. Because you are missing the sharing of daily experiences and the intimate knowing of a close loved one, you may feel like you don't belong anywhere.

These aspects of sorrow can build on each other, and you may be afraid to start crying in case you never stop.

WHAT HELPS

HONOR AND SADNESS

This is a natural part of experiencing your loss. Give yourself permission to include grief as part of your life right now. Balance feeling the sadness with doing the things that need doing.

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES

Find people with whom you can be sad. The company of other bereaved people may be comforting as you can assume that they will have some similar experiences and understanding.



EXPRESS YOUR SORROW

It may be helpful to have a regular time and place to allow yourself to be sad and to weep, such as in your morning shower, at the graveside, or sitting on a memorial bench. Evening is not a good time for this, as deep emotion can disturb your sleep.

CREATE WAYS OF REMEMBERING

Find meaningful yet realistic ways to keep the person who died in your life. Talk to him, celebrate her birthday, put up a Christmas stocking, keep his pictures out, talk about her. You will find what feels natural and positive for you.

THE OTHER SIDE OF SORROW

In "The Prophet," Kahlil Gibran says, "Your joy is your sorrow unmasked." Once the hardest part of sadness is done, there comes a sweetness in which you are able to recall the good times. Memories bring a sense of loving and being loved.

SUPPORTING A GRIEVING PERSON

BE GENUINE BY BEING YOURSELF

Your connection with the bereaved person should be a continuation of your usual relationship with them. If you are a close friend, they will want and expect caring contact from you. A bereaved person will not want anyone to assume an unfamiliar intimacy now. Your sensitivity and dependability can make a difference to how understood and supported they feel.

ACKNOWLEDGE THE LOSS AS SOON AS YOU CAN AFTER YOU GET THE NEWS

Send a sympathy card with a note of personal condolence. Don't let fear of saying or doing the wrong thing hold you back from talking with the bereaved person. Simply say that you are sorry to hear of the death, mention the person by name, and be willing to listen to what the bereaved person may say. Ask how you can be helpful, and offer some assistance in a way that feels comfortable for you.

GET GOOD INFORMATION ABOUT GRIEF SO THAT YOU UNDERSTAND THE NORMAL RESPONSES AND PHASES OF GRIEF

Grief is a natural and necessary process that helps the bereaved person to adjust to life without the person who died.

BE WILLING TO OPEN THE SUBJECT AND TO MENTION THE NAME OF THE PERSON WHO DIED

Rather than filling conversation with other topics, let the bereaved person talk with you about the death and their feelings. If there are silences, let these be shared moments of quiet without rushing to fill the gap.

LISTEN TO THE BEREAVED PERSON

The death of someone important is painful. Trying to "cheer up" a



bereaved person denies the significance and depth of their grief. You can help by allowing the expression of feelings – guilt, sorrow, anger, sadness – without judgment. These feelings are healthy and normal aspects of grief.

REACH OUT TO OFFER SUPPORT

Be there by making regular contact over time. Many bereaved people find it hard to reach out or are concerned about being a burden on friends and family. Your initiative in keeping in touch will be appreciated.

BE PATIENT

Mourning takes lots of time, and grief never entirely goes away. The bereaved person will have ups and downs as they move through their grief. Be flexible in how you offer support as the needs of the bereaved person will change with the grief process.

UNDERSTAND THAT EVERYONE GRIEVES IN THEIR OWN WAY AND AT THEIR OWN PACE

How a person grieves is a result of their personality, their past history of loss, and the relationship that they had with the person who died. Accept the bereaved person's evaluation of the significance of the loss and the depth of their feelings.

REMEMBER THAT THERE IS NO RIGHT WAY TO GRIEVE

Avoid criticizing how someone is grieving; you cannot know what is best for them. Most often, a person's strengths, coping mechanisms, and network of family, friends, and acquaintances are sufficient to sustain them through their grief. However, if you are concerned, encourage them to take care of themselves by getting help from their minister, doctor, or counselor.

EXPECT THAT YOUR OWN GRIEF MAY BE TRIGGERED

These feelings may be related to this loss or to a loss that happened in your own past. You may want to share things that have been

helpful to you when you were grieving. Be sensitive in how and when you share suggestions or your own feelings. Ask yourself: Does the bereaved person want to know? Will it feel helpful to them now?

OFFER PRACTICAL HELP

IN THE DAYS AFTER THE DEATH HAS OCCURRED

- Help with answering the phone
- Make lists of what needs to be done
- Bring a meal
- Do errands and shopping
- Take care of the children
- Be a chauffeur to appointments

IN THE MONTHS FOLLOWING THE DEATH

- Bring and share a meal
- Spend time to listen
- Help with garden chores or household maintenance
- Offer some holiday baking
- Share a regular walk or outing
- Offer expertise you may have
- Remember anniversaries, birthdays, and special holidays

WHEN THE BEREAVED PERSON IS READY

- Help build a bridge to the future
- Include them in social gatherings with new people
- Accompany them to new activities
- Encourage their growing independence
- Welcome their new friends into your social circle
- Continue to remember the person who died and talk about them





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