

Experiences of Grief

Grief is a normal and natural reaction to the death of a loved one. Most of us are not prepared for the long journey of grief which is sometimes devastating, frightening, and often lonely. We may think, do, and say things that are unlike us. There seems to be no respite and no end to the intense feelings that we experience.

Grief has been likened to a raw open wound. With great care it eventually will heal but there will always be a scar. Life will never be the same, but eventually you will get better.

The experiences of grief have been compared to enduring a fierce storm at sea. The waves are peaked and close together. Eventually the sea becomes calmer, but occasionally the storm regroupes, strengthening without warning. For several hours, days, OR weeks, you may not feel grief; then suddenly you meet someone, or see something, or hear something, and grief resumes. It seems as if you are taking one step forward and two back.

Grief has its common and unique sides. Although it is a universal experience, no two people grieve the same, even in the same family. Like a snowflake or a fingerprint, each person's grief has characteristics all on its own.

It is important to understand some of the following concepts about grief:

Grief Work: The expression “grief work” is very true. It may be the hardest work that you will ever perform. It is draining.

Control: We CANNOT control the feelings that arise within us. These feelings come from deep inside, but we can choose what to do with them. We can accept or reject them. To deny only prolongs our grief. Remember, what we do determines whether we remain in our grief or survive. Feelings are not bad or wrong. They should be recognized and faced honestly.

Choices: About grief: there are no choices, you MUST go through it. The expression of grief is essential for good emotional and physical health even though it is painful and difficult. There are no easy answers or short cuts, no way under, over, or around your grief. Although grief may hurt desperately, you must get through it.

Major Decisions: It is strongly suggested not to make major decisions (such as moving, money matters, etc.) unless absolutely necessary during the early stages of grief when judgement is cloudy. The conventional wisdom, “Never act in haste”, was never more applicable.

Listener(S): Find someone who will listen. Talking is therapy.

Grief Has No Timetable: Grief often takes much longer than the bereaved or the people in their lives expect. It helps to take one hour, one day at a time.



Remember: People have a natural inclination to recover. Eventually you'll look back and realize you weren't going crazy...you were grieving.

Be patient with yourself. Recovering from grief takes time.

It is important to understand the various experiences of grief. Everyone does not necessarily go through every experience, nor do they go through them in any set order. Each person has his or her own timetable and his or her own style of grief. You may struggle with several feelings at the same time. The depth and duration of each experience is different for everyone. You may experience a feeling briefly, intermittently or struggle with it daily. Understanding the various phases helps you to cope. Knowing that others have gone through this pain and have eventually been able to reinvest themselves in life gives one a sense of HOPE.