

## Grief, Loss Resolution


**W**hen someone we love dies, a feeling of deep, painful grief is a natural and common response. Actually, grief can be triggered by the loss of anything we value, anything in which we have invested time, energy, a part of ourselves – a job, a work of art, a beloved pet.


Whatever the cause, the feeling of grief often comes in waves. The first flooding, crushing tidal wave usually subsides within a few days or weeks, but even months later an unexpected, poignant memory will bring on tears, a sudden constriction of the chest, a lump in the throat. Over time, these peaks become less intense and less frequent, and eventually they fade away.


In most cases, though, grief and sadness are not the only emotions we experience in connection with loss. Before an impending loss, we often torture ourselves with false hopes. Afterwards, we may be consumed by guilt, even if others can see that it is irrational: "If only I had made him go to the doctor sooner." Equally common are feelings of anger and relief. These reactions can be even more insidious in the damage that they do, because many people are ashamed of such feelings and cannot admit to them.

Various factors in ourselves or our environments can also make grief more prolonged and difficult, by leaving behind a sense of unresolved issues or by delaying or interfering with the process of resolution. For example, if the death was very sudden, there will be a sense of many things left undone and unsaid. If we deny our own feelings or perceive that others disapprove of them because they are not "proper" or "legitimate," we do not get rid of the feelings – we only cut ourselves off from dealing with them. If multiple losses have occurred in too short a time in the past, we may not have the inner resources left to cope with the present. If the people we are used to depending on are overwhelmed by their own feelings, our social support network may unravel when we need it most. Or if those around us do not share our sense of loss, they may be unable to relate to what we are experiencing. The following are a few important guidelines for those who are grieving.

**1** Recognize that each person grieves in his or her own way. Some people need to talk about their loss and to express their feelings openly, but that is not true of everyone. Giving other people the message that they are unhealthy or foolish or simply wrong because

they do not grieve the way they are "supposed" to, because they cry too much or do not cry at all, is unsupportive and unhelpful. Telling yourself this message is just as destructive. 

**2** Support the acknowledgement and acceptance of all of the thoughts and feelings that arise from the loss. Telling people that they "shouldn't" feel what they are feeling never works. Instead, it only adds to the feelings of guilt, isolation and anger. Acknowledging and working through the feelings is a much more effective way to resolve them. 

**3** Recognize that the healing will take time. In our culture, we have somehow become uncomfortable with grief and mourning. A person who wears black after the funeral – or even at the funeral itself – is looked upon with distaste. A week of emergency leave is seen as sufficient, if not excessive. In reality, it is not uncommon for full recovery to take several months to a year. 

**4** Anticipate problems when you can. Holidays, anniversaries and birthdays may bring up memories of earlier times and acute awareness of the

*Continued on page 8...*

*Joy and Grief*

were mingled in the cup; but there were no bitter tears: for even grief itself arose so softened, and clothed in such sweet and tender recollections, that it became a solemn pleasure, and lost all character of pain.

*Charles Dickens*