



A GUIDE TO GRIEF

This guide will help you understand the grief you and others may feel after a death, whether sudden or anticipated. We hope this guide will help you realize that these feelings are not unusual and things can get better. You are not alone.

The Grieving Process

Grief is painful and at times the pain seems unbearable. It is a combination of many emotions that come and go, sometimes without warning. Grieving is the period during which we actively experience these emotions. How long and how difficult the grieving period is depends on the relationship with the person who dies, the circumstances of the death, and the situation of the survivors.

Feelings and Symptoms of Grief

Experts describe the process of grieving and the emotions of grief in various ways. The most commonly described reactions are: Shock, Denial, Anger, Guilt, Depression, Acceptance, and Growth. Some people experience the grieving process in this order. Most often, a person feels several of these emotions at the same time, perhaps in different degrees.

Shock

If the death comes suddenly, as in an accident or murder, shock is often

the first response people feel. Even if the death is anticipated, there may be disbelief at its finality. A person may be numb, or, like a robot, be able to go through the motions of life while actually feeling little. At the same time, physical symptoms such as confusion and loss of appetite are common.

Denial

Shock and denial are nature's way of softening the immediate blow of death. Denial can follow soon after the initial shock. People may know their loved one has died, but some part of them can't yet accept the reality of the death. It is not uncommon to fantasize that the deceased will walk through the door, as if nothing has happened. Some people leave bedrooms unchanged or make future plans as if the loved one will participate, just as in the past.

Anger

Anger is normal. It may be directed at the deceased for leaving and causing a sense of abandonment, or at the doctors and nurses who did not do enough, or at a murderer who killed without remorse. People of faith may feel anger at God, for allowing so much pain and anguish. Anger may also be directed at oneself for not saving the life of the loved one. It can be a mild feeling or a raging irrational emotion. It can test one's faith in religion or even in the goodness of life.

Guilt

Few survivors escape some feeling of guilt and regret. "I should have done more" are words that haunt many people. Were angry words exchanged? Most people are very creative in finding reasons for guilt. So many things could have been done differently "if only I had known."

Sadness

Sadness is the most inevitable emotion of grief. It is normal to feel abandoned, alone and afraid. After the shock and denial have passed and the anger has been exhausted, sadness and even hopelessness may set in. A person may have little energy to do even the simplest daily chores. Crying episodes may seem endless.

Acceptance

Time alone will not heal grief. Acknowledging the loss and experiencing the pain may free the survivor from a yearning to return to the past. Accepting life without the lost loved one may give way to a new perspective about the future. Acceptance does not mean forgetting, but rather using the memories to create a new life without the loved one. Hoping for things to be as they were may be replaced by a search for new relationships and new activities.

Growth

Grief is a chance for personal growth. For many people, it may eventually lead to renewed energy to invest in

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