

BEREAVEMENT NEWSLETTER

DEPRESSION

Frequently a person slides “into the pits” after the death of a loved one. It is also referred to as “feeling down”, “the blues”, “the blahs”, “down in the dumps”, “under the weather”, “lower than a snake’s belly”. What people are describing is a normal human experience, an unavoidable part of grief – **Depression!**

Nearly everyone experiences depression from time to time. It lets us know that we are human and that some event in our life is causing us difficulty. Bereaved people have a good reason to feel down. Depression is a feeling, a mood, an emotion of being sad, frustrated and discouraged. It may feel like helplessness, expressed by “I can’t go on”; “I can’t cope”; “What’s the point?”; “My life is over”.

Depression can surface as irritability, withdrawal, loss of interest in usual activities, lack of energy, unusual self-criticism, loss of appetite, inability to sleep or excessive sleeping, difficulty in concentrating and making decisions, and a general inability to function.

We are a society that fears and fights depression. As bereaved people, it is important that you do not become alarmed by symptoms of depression. **It is a normal part of grief.**

When should you become concerned enough about your depression to seek professional help? -- If the symptoms become severe and continue over an extended period of time. If the pain and problems outweigh pleasure most of the time. If you are completely retreating from the outside world and have thoughts of suicide. If you are living in a world with little emotional satisfaction either in self, in activities, or in other people. If you find yourself coping by using drugs or alcohol. -- When you do go to a doctor or counselor, be sure to state that you are grieving, so that your depression will be understood and treated in that context.

Lowered self-esteem is often experienced along with depression. When an important person in your life dies, your self-worth and self-respect, which you took for granted, seem to be gone. When someone you love has been taken away from you, you may feel that a part of you has died also. In the case of a spouse’s death, the “we” part of your identity does not exist anymore, and you may begin to wonder who you really are. This feeling does not need to go on forever, however. As you move along in your grief process, you will learn to let go and to allow yourself to change.

This changing takes some effort on your part, and it isn't easy. You can learn new things about yourself. You learn to change your way of dealing with people. You learn to change your attitudes. You learn ways of handling everyday situations. You learn that the trust and faith you need come from inside you. There is no magic formula for regaining your self-esteem. You will need to work on it, and gradually you will become more comfortable with yourself and realize how important you really are. As you change, accept the fact that you are worthwhile, and you need to be good to yourself.

*Life is Change, Growth is Optional
And Fairness is not guaranteed.
(Karen Kaiser Clark)*

Suggestions for Coping with Depression

- Realize that depression is a normal part of grief. It is best to face it and work through it rather than avoiding it.
- Recognize that the major responsibility for dealing with depression lies with you. Acknowledge the depression and be open to accepting help.
- Identify things which are most troubling to you. Make a list of things you need to do. It often looks less overwhelming on paper than it does in your mind.
- Exercise helps you to relax and relieve tension. It will also help you sleep better.
- Try harder to like yourself. Treat yourself as you would a good friend.
- Keep interested in other people and be involved with helping them. Caring about others helps you keep problems in a realistic perspective.
- Avoid depressive situations and people. Try to look at life more positively. Try to keep from expecting that bad things will happen to you.
- Attempt to think pleasant thoughts for one minute. Then develop this habit.
- Do something you enjoy and that you do well. Little accomplishments help you to regain self confidence.
- Remember that you have a choice. Depression does not have to control you and ruin your life. It can be managed.

*Live through the hurt so the
Joy can return to warm your heart.
(Darcie D. Sims)*

How Long Will The Pain Last?

How long do I have to wait for this pain to be over? Unfortunately there is no time line for grief, and if you put yourself on a timetable, you are likely to be very disappointed.

The first year is difficult because of all the “firsts” – the first birthday, the first anniversary, the first Christmas, etc. But that doesn’t mean that the grief will be over on day 366. Rather than feeling a little better as each day goes by, you will find that grief is more like a roller coaster ride. You will have some good days and some bad days. As time goes by, you will have more good days and fewer bad days.

You will probably find that your friends and family have ideas on how long your grief should last. They may tell you that you “should be over this by now”. It is important to be patient and gentle with yourself and take as much time as you need for your grief. Each person is different, and there are no rules on how long to grieve. The fewer expectations you have for yourself, the better your grief will progress.

Coping gets easier as time goes by. Life gradually returns to a new type of “normal”. You will begin to feel good again, but you won’t return to being exactly the way you once were. Accept yourself for who you are and who you are becoming.

Courage To Live With Tough Circumstances

By Judy Tatelbaum, MSW

When facing the loss of loved ones or our own ill health, the loss of a job or home, the results of an accident or aging, we can’t help but wonder: Why me? Why must I suffer? No answers satisfy us. Instead, asking “Why?” usually leads us to feel more miserable. Trying to justify and explain painful life events doesn’t make them easier.

Whenever we face tough times or painful events, we need to find some courage and perspective. Although we may not have much choice about the events that befall us, we can choose how we confront and react to misfortune.

Instead of asking, “Why me?”, we might ask, “Why not me? Why should I be spared painful events in life? Why shouldn’t I learn how to conquer my life?” Who said that life was easy – for anybody? Every one of us has to face painful experiences at some time.

If we believed that the purpose of being human was to live through a wide range of experiences so that our soul could grow and expand, today might not seem quite so terrible. If we could envision life as a series of varied experiences and special lessons, perhaps part of a larger context of many lifetimes, today might not seem quite so awful, frightening or overwhelming.

This viewpoint can empower us to confront tough times. If we envision being alive as attending a specialized training school, then we can value our education and see experiences as

purposeful. Trusting that we don't have to take the same courses forever, we can also have faith that our pain won't last, that our lessons will be different next year.

It's clear we are not all taking the same course work at the same time. As we travel through life we each have our own set of experiences and lessons, specialized learning related to our own unique destiny.

When we have the courage to stand apart from our everyday view of ourselves, and envision a larger picture of why we are here and what's happening to us, it can help us to accept painful moments, upsetting experiences, and even our fear of the future. This kind of perspective can help us deal with the loss of our health, or of someone we dearly loved.

Taking life on with courage, trusting that we are meant to learn from our pain, is a powerful step toward healing ourselves. This way we have a chance to grow beyond this painful today and move toward a more wonderful future. May we each have the courage to learn from our experiences, and to use those experiences as stepping stones to fulfilled and satisfying lives.

Excerpts from an article in "Journeys"

Other Resources You Might Find Helpful:

Grief: What It Is and What You Can Do.

By Joy and Marv Johnson. A small, easy-to-understand book on feelings, issues, rituals, and caring for yourself.

Grieving: How to Go on Living When Someone You Love Dies.

A thorough discussion of bereavement by award-winning clinical psychologist, Terese A. Rando.

BEREAVEMENT NEWSLETTER

Published by:

Hospice of Siouxland

224 Fourth Street
Sioux City, IA 51101
712-233-4144 / 1-800-383-4545

To contact a Bereavement Coordinator please call Hospice of Siouxland at the number listed above.

Written and Compiled by: Ruth E. Meisgeier, MSE and Pat Van Bramer, RN