

**DEATH OF A CHILD:** The death of a child, at any age, is considered the most profound loss a person ever has to endure. When a child dies, parents feel that a part of them and their future has died also. Children are not supposed to die before their parents - it's against the "rules of nature". Parents often deal with extreme guilt: "Shouldn't I have kept my child safe and healthy?" Parents feel a complete loss of control.

Grief over a child's death can affect a couple's relationship. Since both are grieving, each is often emotionally incapable of providing support to the other. Because men and women grieve differently, one parent often misunderstands the way the other is handling grief, and this can cause difficulties.

For any type of loss find someone who understands and is willing to listen - someone who has had a similar loss. Joining a support group can also be very beneficial.

**Other Resources You Might Find Helpful:**

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**GRIEF JOURNEY**

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*Please call us if you have any questions or would like to visit about your loss.*

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# GRIEF JOURNEY

## STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT FEELINGS

When your loved one died, you probably expected to feel sad and therefore were able to accept your sadness as "normal". What you may not have been aware of was how many other feelings (emotions) are also a part of the grief process. This month's Grief Journey will address the normal feelings which can be a part of your grief experience.

Although individuals respond to loss in many ways, there are similar characteristics felt by everyone. Some of what you are feeling may seem strange and frightening. Even though you may not be able to name the feelings you are experiencing, they belong to you and all of them are okay.

Our feelings come from deep inside, and we cannot control them when they arise in us. We can, however, choose **what** to do with these feelings. We can accept them or reject them. To deny or run away from our feelings is not healthy and simply prolongs grief. Recovery is a matter of the heart rather than the head. You are not going to **think** your way through grief as much as you are going to **feel** your way through it. Neither are you going to bargain nor manipulate yourself out of your pain. You must work with your feelings. **If you allow yourself the right to feel, you are also giving yourself permission to heal.**

## WHAT CAN I EXPECT AS NORMAL?

### SHOCK/NUMBNESS/DISBELIEF

During the early days and weeks, you may find yourself feeling that "this can't be" and expecting to awaken from a bad dream. Your numb body manages the daily tasks, but it feels like you are walking through a fog.

### SADNESS/SORROW

Sadness is an emotion which we now seem to carry with us constantly as we go about our daily living. It feels as if it has no beginning or end. This feeling is often described as a sense of emptiness. You may feel as though you will never be happy again. If you feel like crying, by all means cry. Do it as often as you need to and don't worry about crying in front of others. Crying is excellent therapy.

### ANXIETY/FEAR

You may find yourself anxious or afraid about things which never affected you before. Some people even feel like they are going crazy. Others are afraid they will not make it through this

suffering. You may be worried about your future - worried that you or someone else close to you may also die - even worried about how others will view the way you are grieving.

### **ANGER**

You may find yourself getting angry more easily than normal. If you are angry, you have good reason to be. Your life seems out of control right now. You have been cheated. Some people are angry at those around them, at the disease, at God, or even at the person who died.

### **GUILT/REGRET**

Feelings of guilt are very normal when one is grieving. This guilt may be about what you did or did not do - said or did not say - when your loved one was alive. Caring for a sick person can be a very demanding, exhausting job. Many fine people have lost their tempers and said things they ordinarily would never have said. Guilt can also be the result of unfinished business with the deceased. Exploring your regrets is healthy and you can learn from it.

### **HELPLESSNESS/HOPELESSNESS**

The dreams you had for your future may seem to have disappeared and there is nothing you can do about it. Everything seems too overwhelming for you to cope.

### **RESENTMENT/JEALOUSY**

Do you look around and see others who still have their loved ones? They aren't suffering the way you are. Life can seem totally unfair and being resentful or jealous is natural.

### **RELIEF**

When a loved one has died after a lengthy illness, a sense of relief is often experienced. Many survivors are relieved that the suffering of their loved one is over. It can also be a personal relief because the added stress to your own life is over. Along with this relief, however, can come guilt for feeling relieved.

### **DEPRESSION**

You may be thinking, "Nothing will ever be right again." or "What's the meaning of life for me now?" You are confronted with the fact that you need to restructure your life without the presence of a very special person. These thoughts are natural, real, and honest. Depression can have many components such as tension, insomnia, feelings of worthlessness, etc.

## **WHAT CAN I DO WITH THESE FEELINGS?**

Remember that feelings are neither right nor wrong, good nor bad. Feelings are simply feelings. It is important to accept your feelings, reflect on them and permit them to surface in order to deal with them productively.

Putting your feelings into words can be helpful. Find a friend, family member or co-worker with whom you can share your true thoughts and feelings. Find someone who is willing to listen and who will not judge or censor you. Grief groups can be very helpful. You will be invited to our Hospice Grief and Growth program.

You can also get your words and feelings out by writing. By journaling, you can put your feelings on paper and monitor your progress at the same time. You might prefer to write letters to a friend or even to the person who died and describe what is happening in your life. Some people write poetry, draw or paint. Deal with your feelings in a way that feels best for you.

The feelings of grief are like being on a roller coaster ride. You have some good days and some bad ones. At times you may have many emotions all bombarding you at the same time. Please understand that you are not alone in your feelings. They are a natural part of the grief process. They are a sign that you are human and that you loved someone very deeply. Your feelings are very important. Treat them that way.

*There is sacredness in tears.*

*They are not the mark of weakness, but of power.*

*They speak more eloquently than 10,000 tongues.*

*They are the messengers of overwhelming grief,  
of deep contrition and of unspeakable love.*

*by Washington Irving*

## **THE UNIQUENESS OF GRIEF**

**DEATH OF A PARENT:** When a parent dies, you experience the loss in a number of ways. It represents the longest relationship you have ever had. Parents are your earliest teachers. Their wisdom and support is important to you even as you move on to your own adulthood with a career and family of your own.

Well-meaning friends and family may not acknowledge your loss as they inquire about how the surviving parent is doing. The surviving parent may require attention and care that you don't have the energy to provide. Your own family may not understand why you aren't like you used to be. Providing support and trying to meet everyone's needs may mean that you don't have time to work through your grief. Being a responsible, caring adult child is important, but you need to acknowledge your feelings and your limits.

**DEATH OF A SPOUSE:** People who are grieving the loss of a spouse often comment that they had no idea the pain could be so great or that it could last so long. One reason for this is that you have lost not only the person you love, but also your best friend, your lover, your parenting partner, traveling companion, confidant, bookkeeper, your best critic, the person who planned the social calendar, your life partner, dinner companion, and even the one who shared most of your memories.

Everywhere you look, you see couples and you are now a single. You feel uncomfortable doing things with other couples. The house seems so empty because your spouse was always there. The two of you had hopes and dreams of your future and now those have been shattered. You may feel that you are no longer a whole person because your spouse was like a part of you. Even your identity and self-esteem may have been closely linked to that of your spouse.