

Grief

- What to Expect

Hospice Peterborough offers bereavement support for adults, teens and children. If you would like to talk to someone about grief, or become part of a grief support group, please contact:

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Information about grief and bereavement is available in the Resource Library at Hospice Peterborough, open to the public during office hours.
Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm or after hours by appointment

For The Bereaved

Confronting the death of someone you love is perhaps the most challenging situation we face in our lives. It is a time of confusion, uncertainty and loss. Days are filled with tremendous emotional upheaval and life doesn't seem to hold much meaning anymore.

Many in this situation would prefer to avoid or distract themselves from these feelings. Trying to sidestep grief can have a very detrimental effect upon our lives. It can prevent us from resolving the deep emotions and leave us stuck and unable to change and grow.

Grief is a natural response that occurs when someone we love dies. The goal of grief is to help us acknowledge the pain, accept the reality of our situation and discover new ways of experiencing life to the fullest. Grief is not easy, but if we work through it we will experience new balance and health in living.

This pamphlet will give you some valuable information about grief that will assist you in your recovery.



GETTING STARTED

You need to give yourself permission to grieve and to work through the feelings you may experience in your grief. Some emotions which may be present are: anger, anxiety, denial, depression, disbelief, fear, frustration, guilt, isolation, loneliness, panic, powerlessness, sadness, sorrow, shock, uncertainty, as well as sleeplessness, fatigue and other physical signs. Quite a list! By no means will everyone feel all these emotions, and phases we will mention do not always happen in any order.

PHASES OF GRIEF

NUMBNESS: Feeling overwhelmed, dazed, unable to cope, unable to express emotion. This may be interspersed with episodes of panic or even outbursts of anger or distress.

YEARNING, SEARCHING: Enduring intense pining, episodes of tearful sobbing and distress. Some may have vivid dreams in which the deceased seems actually to be present. Others may seek reassurances or derive comfort from contact with an article which belonged to the deceased.

DISORGANIZATION: Experiencing financial constraints, the need to change a living place and lifestyles, exclusion from social events, tasks of parting with articles belonging to the deceased - all these may cause feelings of depression, apathy or despair - feeling that we lack a purpose in life and motivation to live.

REORGANIZATION: Realizing the need to move on with life and working through feelings to develop new ways to obtain information, to learn, to plan and make decisions - redefining oneself.

The Tasks of Mourning

1. To accept the reality of loss.
2. To work through the pain of grief.
3. To adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing.
4. To emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life.

Worden, J. William. Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner. New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1982.



Working Your Way Through The Process of Grieving

1. Allow Yourself To Mourn

Grief is a natural and necessary process. There is no easy way to get through this period. You may feel frightened, overwhelmed and lonely. Reach out for help. Grief support groups are available to help you move towards healing.

2. Realize Your Grief is Unique

Your grief is influenced by the relationship you had with the person who died, the circumstances surrounding the death, your emotional support system, your religious and cultural beliefs and your life experiences. No other person will grieve exactly as you do. Don't try to compare your situation to another's. Allow yourself to live one day at a time and grieve at your own pace. You have a right to be you.

3. Talk

Find a special person to whom you can express your grief - someone who is able simply to listen. Tell stories about your loved one and share your feelings and concerns. Talking does not cause stress. It relieves it.

4. Be Ready For Emotions

The loss of someone you love affects your head, heart and spirit. You will probably experience a variety of emotions, unsettling in their variety, intensity and unpredictability. Remember that all these emotions are normal and healthy. Through experiencing them you are moving toward grief recovery.

5. Be Gentle With Yourself

Mourning is hard work. You may feel tired, listless even numb. This is the time to lighten your schedule as much as possible. Try to eat healthy foods, exercise regularly and get plenty of rest each day.



When you are grieving you can expect that:

- ◆ Your grief will take longer than most people think it should.
- ◆ Your grief will take more energy than you can imagine.
- ◆ Your grief will show itself in all areas of your life: social, physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual.
- ◆ You will grieve for many things. You will grieve for what you have lost as well as for the future; for the hopes and dreams and unfulfilled expectations you held for and with that person.
- ◆ You may experience trouble thinking, concentrating and making decisions.
- ◆ You may feel like you are going crazy.
- ◆ You may be obsessed with death or preoccupied with thoughts of the dead person.
- ◆ You will have a number of physical reactions.
- ◆ Certain dates, events, seasons and reminders will bring upsurges in your grief long after the death has occurred.
- ◆ Society will have unrealistic expectations about your mourning and may respond inappropriately.

Adapted from: Therese A. Rando Grieving: How to go on Living When Someone you Love Dies, Toronto, Lexington Books, 1988

When is Mourning Finished?

Mourning is a long process. Some grief counsellors believe when you can remember the deceased without spasms of tears and intense feelings of loss, only then is grieving finished. Others say when "The Tasks of Mourning" are completed, then mourning is over. For some, grieving always stays in a corner of the heart.

Each person's journey is unique. There will be low periods and high periods. It may be a case of two steps forward and one step back. There is no time table or schedule to be followed. The time will come when you realize that life goes on and you will be able to laugh, love and be happy again.

Grief is work - time consuming and difficult. At the end you realize that you are not the same person as before. You are stronger and more capable of coping with whatever challenges lie ahead.



Helpful Ways to Support a Grieving Person

People who are grieving need to know that others really care. It is a difficult time as they struggle, on an emotional roller-coaster, to adjust to a different life. To best support your friend, remember that each person is different, working through a situation unique to him or her.

BE AWARE

Grief work is a natural process. If you understand the process of grief you can help your friend accept that what they are experiencing is both normal and necessary.

LISTEN

Grieving people need to talk. Rather than searching for the right thing to say concentrate on listening. The bereaved may want to repeat the same thing a dozen times. Their feelings of guilt, anger, sorrow or depression may need repetition to be dispelled. If the grieving person has said one hundred words to the listener's one, then the listener has helped.

REACH OUT - KEEP IN TOUCH

A person who has lost a loved one is often overwhelmed with visitors for a week or two. Later the house is empty. Even good friends may stay away, believing people in sorrow like to be alone. Friends are needed most when the sympathy letters have been read and acknowledged and when others have returned to their daily routines. Grief is not a problem to be solved but a process to be experienced. Journey along with your friend. When they are in pain, don't try to cheer them up, just let them know that whatever happens, you will be there.

DO SOMETHING REAL

Small things make a big difference in showing someone you care. One tangible and practical act of kindness - running an errand, taking the children to school, bringing in a meal, can make an immense impact on the well being of the bereaved.

HELP BUILD A BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE

People in grief often withdraw. Encourage your friend to get involved in new activities and hobbies. Offer rides to meetings. Gently remind them of the things they used to enjoy. Help them to reconnect with life.

BE PATIENT

Try to remember that the process of mourning takes time.

Adapted from [Being a Supportive Friend to a Grieving Person](#) from the Hospice of North Central Florida

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