



GHS Hospice of the Foothills

Grief: A Normal and Natural Response

Starting in childhood, many people are taught to face life's crises with a "stiff upper lip," to "bear up and be strong." Because of the influence of these subconscious messages, we may become fearful that any show of emotion—particularly tears—will be interpreted as a sign of weakness.

One of the tragedies in our society today is that many bereaved people experience their grief alone, mistakenly believing that there must be something wrong with them, or that they are the only ones who have ever felt or behaved in these strange ways. Fearful of appearing "crazy" to others, many people hide their true feelings of grief.

It is important for you to know that what you are experiencing is a normal, natural and expected response to the loss of a significant person in your life. Your grief reaction may take a similar course to one or more of the following descriptions, written by other bereaved persons:

Mental Responses

- "I feel sick to my stomach. I just can't eat!"
- "I have trouble getting to sleep, and after I finally do, I only sleep for a few hours before I am up again."
- "I keep thinking about everything that happened, over and over again in my mind. I guess I'm trying to make sense of it all."
- "I think I'm losing my mind. I can't concentrate on anything. I couldn't even decide what to wear today."
- "Yesterday I heard my loved one call for me in the night, and today I thought I saw him in his rocking chair."
- Other mental manifestations: Lack of initiative, forgetfulness, tension and anxiety.

Emotional Responses

- "If only I had told him/her one more time, 'I love you.'"
- "He should have gone to the doctor months ago."
- "The nights and the weekends are the worst for me—empty and lonely."

- "It's as if at any time he'll call or come walking through the door."
- "I keep thinking of things to tell him."
- Other emotional reactions: Feelings of relief, anguish, depression, unexpected and uncontrolled crying.

Social Responses

- "I thought this would bring our family closer. Instead, we constantly bicker."
- "When I'm feeling up, my husband is depressed, and when he's up, I'm down."
- Other social reactions: Responding to others with anger or irritability, loss of desire to be with others, loss of motivation and spontaneity.

Spiritual Responses

- "If my faith were stronger, I would be able to handle this."
- "If I really believed, this would not have happened."

A loved one's death often causes the bereaved to challenge and examine his or her faith or philosophy of life. Don't be disturbed if you are questioning long-held beliefs. Talk about it. For many, faith offers help during extremely difficult times. For others, struggling with their faith is common at this time.

It helps to become involved with a group of persons having similar experiences, such as one of our bereavement support groups offered throughout the year. Sharing your feelings eases the loneliness and promotes the expression of grief in an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding.

Once we understand and accept that our grief is normal, we can find healing and hope for the future as we reorganize our lives in a positive way.

Please call us at **(864) 882-8940** if we can help you in any way.