



GHS Hospice of the Foothills

Moving Through Grief

Grief is an intense and complex journey for most of us. We cannot complete this journey overnight, as much as we'd like to. To successfully move through our grief, we need to take an active role in our own healing process.

Many times you will have questions about whether your feelings and reactions are normal. It helps to understand how human beings respond to loss. Let's look together at the journey through grief. Each part of the journey requires something different of us.

We react to our loss with shock, numbness and disbelief.

When we experience a trauma, one of our first reactions is to shut down or go numb. This cushions us from overwhelming feelings during our early grief. We may feel as if we are on automatic pilot during the first weeks.

Even when a death is expected, it still comes as a shock. We just can't know how a particular loss is going to feel until it actually occurs. Part of us may feel that the loss is unreal, a nightmare or a terrible mistake. How long it takes each of us to emerge from the numbness depends on the individual circumstances surrounding each loss.

We begin the difficult journey of understanding that our loss is real. As the numbness wears off, we begin to realize what the loss is going to mean to us.

This explains why many bereaved people feel worse after a few months have gone by. The reality of the loss starts to sink in. Part of us may still be looking for our deceased loved one to come back into our life. Ironically, we begin some of our hardest times of grieving at a point when the support we received immediately after the death has tapered off.

We allow ourselves to experience the pain of our grief in all its forms. There are no shortcuts through the pain of loss. We can stuff down feelings and delay grieving, but the grief will not diminish until we experience it fully.

In a culture where we often equate pain with weakness, it is important to give ourselves permission to allow our pain to take its natural course. We have provided a list of some common emotions and behaviors that are part of the pain of grief.

Typical Experiences During Grief

- Emptiness
- Disorganization
- Disorientation
- Indecisiveness
- Vulnerability
- Anxiety
- Change in sleep patterns
- Physical aches and pains
- Change in appetite
- Extreme loneliness
- Feeling abandoned
- Inability to concentrate
- Loss of interest in life
- Questioning of belief system
- Anger
- Guilt
- Hopelessness
- Depression
- Panicky thoughts
- Relief
- Yearning

Now that you're familiar with the experiences that are part of grief, here are some suggestions to keep you moving in the right direction as you work your way through your grief.

- Accept the grief. Roll with the tides of it. Don't make the mistake of thinking that you are only strong if you deny you are grieving. Take time to cry.
- Talk about your loss. Share your grief with other family members. Do not try to "protect" them by being silent.
- Find a friend to talk to—someone who won't try to tell you to "snap out of it"—and talk often.

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- Deal with guilt, real or imagined. If you made mistakes, accept the fact that you, like everyone else, are not perfect. If you continue to blame yourself, consider professional or religious counseling.
- Keep yourself busy. Do work that has a purpose, and find ways to engage your mind.
- Make healthy eating choices. Grief stresses the body. You need good nourishment now more than ever. Vitamin and mineral supplements may help.
- Exercise regularly. Exercising causes biochemical changes that help you to feel better and sleep better. Return to an old program or start a new one. An hour-long walk every day is ideal for many people.
- Nurture yourself. Try to do something good for yourself each day. Think of what you might do for someone else if that person were in your place, then do that favor for yourself.
- Join a group of others who are grieving. You need friends who have been through similar experiences.
- Associate with old friends also. Some will be uneasy at first, but they will move past it. If and when you can, talk and act naturally, without avoiding the subject of your loss.
- Postpone major decisions. Wait before deciding whether or not to sell your house or change jobs.
- Record your thoughts in a journal. Writing helps you express your feelings. It also helps you track your progress.
- Turn grief into creative energy. Find a way to help others—sharing someone else's load will lighten your own. Write something as a tribute to your loved one.
- Take advantage of a religious affiliation. If you have been inactive, this might be the time to become involved again. For some people, grief opens the door to faith. After a time, you might not be as mad at God as you once were.
- Get professional counseling if you need it. Do not allow crippling grief to continue. There comes a time to stop crying and live again. Sometimes just a few sessions with a trained counselor will help a lot.
- Remember that no matter how deep your sorrow, you are not alone. Others have been there and will help share your load if you will let them.

Please call us at **(864) 882-8940** if there is anything we can help you with.