



UNDERSTANDING GRIEF

What To Expect In A Time Of Loss



Life's greatest gifts and deepest sorrows are born in the love we share with others. Courageous are those who love and tender are those who grieve. Although no two people are exactly alike, and no two people grieve the same way, much is known about what to expect in a time of loss.

Shock, Numbness and Disbelief

Expected or not, the death of a loved one triggers the body's natural shock response. Early on, you may feel numb, dazed, absorbed in your own thoughts, disoriented or detached from yourself and your surroundings. You may feel the urge to move/pace or sit motionless for extended periods of time.

Sadness, Despair and Tearfulness

As shock begins to fade, sadness and tears often intensify. You may expect to feel better but actually feel worse. The intensity of your tears and sadness may feel overwhelming, and you might question your ability to cope. It is important to know that tears are the body's natural way of healing itself. It is healthy to cry.

Loneliness and Isolation

Loneliness is natural and unavoidable when the person you shared your life with dies. Your world has indelibly changed, but the rest of the world may appear to be going on as if nothing happened. You may have difficulty adjusting to the pace of everyday life. There is a disparity in energy and well-being between yourself and others. You may avoid phone calls and social activities. Comfort and kindness often help to soothe loneliness and isolation.



Difficulty Concentrating and Forgetfulness

You may find it hard to think, read, concentrate, learn, plan or organize. You may be forgetful or absentminded. Tasks once handled with ease may be difficult now. Know this is normal and go easy on yourself. Pushing yourself too hard will only create more stress at an already stressful time. In time, with patience and understanding, your level of functioning will return to normal. Respect your limits and ask for help when needed.

Irritable and Angry

Anger is a common, yet often unexpected, reaction to loss, and it can come out of nowhere. You may be angry at God, your loved one, medical personnel, yourself or family members. You may be short tempered and prone to angry outbursts.

Increased or Decreased Appetite

Change in appetite is common at this time. You may have no desire to eat, or you may find comfort in food. Eating is essential for your health, strength and survival. You must eat several times a day whether you are hungry or not. If your appetite is poor, look for foods that taste good and are easy to prepare.



Fatigue, Sleeplessness and Oversleeping

Grief is exhausting and sleep is healing. You may feel tired, listless or apathetic. You may need extra sleep right now. At the same time, you may find it difficult to sleep. Try to rest when you are tired. If necessary, be flexible with your sleep routine and sleep when you are able. There is no need for concern unless you are sleeping all day, every day, without eating or you go several days without sleep. If this happens, see your doctor and consult with a grief counselor because sleep is essential for your health and well-being.

Physical Discomfort

Physical responses to grief include tightness in the throat and chest, sensitivity to noise, shallow breathing, muscular weakness and fatigue. Be sure to discuss physical concerns with your doctor and have regular medical checkups to maintain your physical health.

Guilt and Regrets

As you reflect on the events surrounding your loss, you may regret not knowing or not doing something. It is said that "life is lived forward and understood backward," and hindsight is 20/20. Reflecting on the past is normal, but remember that what you know today is not the same as what you knew before. Try to reflect with kindness and understanding.

First Things First – Eat and Sleep

At the most basic level, your survival depends on eating and sleeping. Starting now, make this your top priority. When you find yourself becoming overwhelmed, go back to these basics. If sleep and appetite difficulties persist, seek medical treatment and speak with a counselor.

Let Others Know How They Can Help

Whether you need a hand to hold, a shoulder to cry on or a shared meal, let others know how they can help. Kindness, patience and understanding are priceless resources in a time of loss. If support is in short supply, enlist the help of a caring professional.

As You Progress

In time, the intensity of your emotional response will likely diminish, and you will begin to experience brief periods of well-being. In the beginning, these may be very brief lasting only a few minutes. You might enjoy the presence of another person or the taste of a favorite food. You might enjoy a pleasurable activity. You may smile or laugh. Tears and sadness will return, and this should be expected. In time, periods of well-being will occur more frequently and last longer. You will resume social activities and explore new activities and interests. Your loss will not go away, but it will not occupy one hundred percent of your attention, and when sadness returns, you will be better able to manage it.



We're Here When You Need Us 