

# Grief is a Natural Response to Loss

Losing someone you love or care about is painful. Death can be overwhelming when you do not understand the many feelings you may experience.

The feelings in grief can be similar yet different. When you experience the death of a parent, grandparent, brother, sister, friend or teacher, how much you grieve will depend on how close you were to the person who died. Your grief process will be a natural expression of the unique relationship you had with that person.

Grief is anormal and natural response to loss. When someone you know has died you may experience some or all of the feelings you are about to read. These feelings can be confusing and sometimes overwhelming, but they are real because you are feeling them.

## Feelings in Grief

This can't be real! You may even find yourself daydreaming about them being alive, when you know in fact they have died. You want to scream NO, it's not true! This feeling of shock and numbness can last hours, days and sometimes weeks.

**Sadness** - As the shock begins to wear *off*, you gradually begin to believe the person is really gone. You feel sad. There may be many tears. You may feel, intense sadness and not be able to cry. You may need to talk about your loss with someone you trust. You are very aware of how much you are going to miss the person you cared so much about. Nothing really makes you happy right now. The empty feeling in your heart just won't seem to go away.

**Loneliness** - Along with sadness comes loneliness. Other people not affected by your loss seem happy and carefree, but you do not feel this way. You may not want to be out with your friends, almost feeling guilty if you are out having fun. You may feel as if no one understands. After the funeral, things seem to go back to normal. It feels like it is all over. Questions like "Why did this have to happen?" "Why her?" "can he really be gone?", still come into your mind. People stop talking about the person who died. It is during this time that it is normal to feel alone with your sadness.

**Anxiety and Fear**- Often after an unexpected death, you can begin to feel nervous. Death has now become a reality in your life. It is no longer just a news story or something that only happens to other people. It has happened to you. This can make you afraid that death may again touch your life. At this time you may worry that something will happen to you, your friends or family. This is a normal reaction to the stress of your loss. Sometimes you may even

experience physical symptoms such as shortness of breath, pains in your chest. Headaches and upset stomach. Most people do experience these kinds of body reactions during the first three weeks following a death. If they continue, you may want to see a doctor.

**Guilt-** We always seem to have regrets when someone dies. We think *of* all the things we wish we-would have said or done. We sometimes think *of* all of the things we wish we *hadn't* said or done. We thought we had a lifetime to say I love you, thank you or I'm sorry. Now you may begin to feel guilty, wishing you had said or done more for that person. Sometimes we even feel guilty for things about which we should not. We begin to ask ourselves questions like, "Did she know I loved her?" "Why wasn't I nicer to him?" "Was it my fault?" *If* you feel guilty, talk to someone, a family member, friend or counselor. Perhaps try writing in a journal or diary about how you feel. Do not keep guilt locked up inside of you. Realize too, you are human...forgive yourself.

**Anger-** Often, during or after feeling guilty you can feel angry. You might be thinking, 'This is not fair! Why did she have to die? Didn't he know I needed him?' If your parent, sister or brother has died, you may for a time resent other people who still have their loved ones with them. You can *feel* jealous, because what has happened IS unfair. Some people may even be angry with God for a while. You can even feel angry with the person who died. You may feel abandoned and alone. Anger can mask our hurt and pain confusing those people who love us and don't understand why we are so angry. Usually angry feelings do not last a long time. If you feel the anger building up inside *of* you, help yourself to express it in a healthy way. Talk with someone you trust. Go *for* a walk. Jog. Lift weights. Beat up on a pillow. Draw. Write. Listen to music. Know that anger is a normal part *of* the grief process, allow *for* its healthy expression.

**Depression -** Depression is a feeling. You may feel sad, quiet, tired, lonely and empty inside. This is a time when you may not want to go out or socialize with friends. You may feel as *if* no one understands or cares about what you are feeling and thinking. You may feel alone and just downright miserable. Being depressed is not a pleasant feeling, but it is a time when you are alone with your thoughts. It is a time to be sad and to think...to think about what has happened to you. It is also a time to begin to sort out and understand and realize that this loss is permanent. When this happens you slowly begin to heal the hurt in your heart. Again, talking *it* out helps. Try to tell at least one person how you feel.

**Healing -** Healing takes time. For some people it may be days or weeks. For other people it may be months or years. But slowly all the feelings that you have been experiencing begin to feel less heavy. Days may go by and you may not even think about the person who has died. You will remember fondly the memories and the good times you shared, but you will have said goodbye to the pain and sadness.

The feelings in grief you have just read begin the minute you know someone has died. Again, you may only experience some of them or all of them. Feelings do not always make sense, but they are real because you are feeling them.

Loss - is something we feel when we are separated from something or someone we care about. There are many kinds of loss we face every day. You can experience grief when a pet dies, when your best *friend* moves away, when your parents' divorce, when you have to change schools, when you and your boyfriend/girlfriend break up or when someone you love dies. Remember, grief is our natural response to loss. And the feelings we experience in grief are normal human emotions that, in time, will pass. They will pass and you will have learned more about life and loving.



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