

Coping with Grief

*“Every substance of a grief hath
twenty shadows”*

William Shakespeare, Richard II

English

This information is important! If you have trouble reading this, ask someone to help you.

Italian

Queste informazioni sono importanti! Se ha difficoltà a leggere questo, chiedi aiuto a qualcuno.

Spanish

¡Esta información es importante! Si tiene dificultad en leer esto, pida que alguien le ayude.

Introduction

Grief can be a time of “unbearable emotional pain.” Feelings of emptiness can surround you as you deal with your personal loss. Doors will open to feelings you never knew or experienced before.

This process of grief will be different for everyone. Each person grieves in different ways and timeframes. It is important to remember there is no right way to grieve.

The intensity of your grief and the period of mourning will fluctuate. You may experience shock, disbelief or numbness, as well as physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach upsets, dizziness and palpitations. Periods of forgetfulness are also common.

Grief in a social way can separate you from others and events that are too painful for you to deal with yet. Grief extends itself to our emotional, physical and spiritual being. Moving forward through the grief process will finally give healing.

The image of a “tear” is expression; “tears of joy” as you remember and “tears of sorrow” as you remember.

The Beginning of Grief

The grief process often begins when people realize a loved one has a serious illness and will likely die.

Patients, who are terminally ill, as well as their families and friends, will mourn many losses. These might include regrets from the past, changes due to illness and thoughts of a future without the ill person.

Beginning Your Journey Of Healing

What to do:

- Try to eat reasonably.
- Tend to your own health needs.
- Try to get adequate rest.
- Realize you are more susceptible to illness when under stress.
- See a doctor if your physical symptoms are concerning you.

Emotional Responses

What to do:

- Realize that numbness often sees you through the first few days or weeks. Do not be surprised if a let down comes later.
- Understand that there is no set time for grieving. It varies from person to person.
- Talk and cry with others when you are ready. While you may feel pressured to put on a brave front, it is important to make your needs known by expressing your feelings to those you trust.
- Support children and let them know that sadness is normal and neither you nor they need to hide it.
- Know that it is okay to experience periods of happiness without feeling guilty.
- Recognize that initially it may be difficult to be alone.
- This does not mean you will always be dependent on others.
- Give yourself space to be quiet and still if that is what you need.
- Be aware that severe upset is not unusual and, if you feel overwhelmed, you may need to seek professional help.

Spiritual

What to do:

- Allow yourself to grieve. Whether you have strong faith and spiritual beliefs or not; everyone needs to grieve.
- Acknowledge your feelings of anger. This is a normal response to the death of a loved one.
- Find someone who is willing to listen to you - explore your thoughts and feelings.
- You may find your religious or spiritual life deepened, renewed or changed as a result of your loss.

Special Days and Holidays

Holidays and special occasions such as birthdays and anniversaries are especially difficult in the first year following the death of a loved one.

Some planning and forethought will help you get through these difficult times.

Relationships

What to do:

- Try to help people understand your needs.
- Be open to support from people outside your immediate circle of family and friends.
- Consider attending social events for brief periods of time - give yourself permission to leave if necessary.
- Take your time with new relationships.



Practical Matters

What to do:

- Avoid making major life decisions during the first year unless it is absolutely necessary.
- Ask for help with forms and applications.
- Get advice from more than one expert before making financial decisions.
- Be gentle with yourself. Special days, holidays and the anniversary of the death of your loved one are emotionally and physically draining. Get adequate rest and exercise. Be aware of increased sugar, caffeine and alcohol intake. Also, be mindful of an overuse of any substances.
- You may wish to recognize the memory of a loved one through a toast at dinner, a donation in memory of or some other significant event.
- Share your feelings with others - both happy and sad.
- Remember that family and friends are not mind readers. Communicate your wishes, needs and emotions.
- Realize that children have different needs and limits; consider their wishes and emotions.
- Know that every holiday and special occasion is different and new, unlike those of the past.
- Enjoy the gifts of each holiday found in special memories and the contact and comfort of family and friends.

Be aware that having a job or doing volunteer work may be helpful when you are ready. Be careful not to over-extend yourself.

Remember, you have the right to:

- Experience grief your way.
- Talk about your grief. This can help you heal.
- Be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits. Respect what your body and mind are telling you.
- Make use of rituals. The funeral, for example, does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It provides support from caring people.
- Express your spirituality. If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that are appropriate to you.
- Treasure your memories.
- Move toward grief and heal. Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly.

Remember, grief is a process, not an event.

Be patient and tolerant with yourself.

Books for Support

Martin J, Ferris F, Buckman R. *I Can't Stop Crying: Grief and Recovery, A Compassionate Guide*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart; 2013.

Rando, TA. *How to Go On Living When Someone You Loves Dies*. New York: Bantam Books; 1991.

Sanders, CM. *Surviving Grief and Learning to Live Again*. New York: Wiley; 1992.

Resources and Support

Seek additional support and information from your doctor, Palliative Care Team, the local library, hospice organizations and funeral homes.

Hospice Association of Ontario's Life Line
Tel: (416) 979-9779

Bereaved Families of Ontario - Toronto
Tel: (416) 440-0290

Acknowledgements

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It is our hope this guide will provide support to caregivers across the city.