

Bereavement Services

Normal Grief Experiences

When you find yourself in grief, you will discover that it has an effect on your mind, body, spirit and heart. This is normal and expected, but can feel overwhelming if you are not prepared or aware of some helpful ways to manage these responses. Below are some common experiences as well as suggestions about how to care for yourself.

Mentally, you may experience:

- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty with concentration and making decisions
- Preoccupation with the person who died
- Thoughts about “what if” and “why”
- Doubt and disbelief about the death itself
- Inability to accept the reality of the death
- Desire to run away, or to busy yourself with distraction, to avoid the pain of the loss
- Inability to rely on yourself as you had in the past

Physically, you may experience:

- Lack of energy/ unusual fatigue
- Periods of nervousness, anxiety or intense panic
- Shortness of breath or breathlessness
- Tightness in the throat and dry mouth
- Weak or tight muscles
- Heaviness in the chest
- Inability to fall or stay asleep
- Lack of desire to eat or overeating
- Headaches and stomach/intestinal disorders
- Visions or hearing the voice of the person who died
- Oversensitivity to noises
- Searching for and calling out
- Comfort or unrest when visiting places
- Carrying and/or treasuring objects

Spiritually, you may experience:

- Questions and /or doubts related to your faith
- Disconnection
- Sense that the person who died is present with you
- Anger towards your higher power
- Search for purpose and meaning
- Exploration of your own mortality

Emotionally, you may experience

- Sadness and/or depression
- Numbness
- Unexpected anger toward others or the person who died
- Uninvited and unpredictable crying
- Mood swings and/or irritability
- Loneliness and feelings of emptiness
- Isolation or sense of unrest around others
- Fear or worry about the future
- Sense of helplessness or powerlessness
- Strong sense of longing for the person who died
- Relief and/or periods of joy

Although you may often feel overwhelmed, know that what you are going through is natural and normal. Following are some suggestions to help you manage all that you are thinking, feeling and experiencing. Know that it takes time to find your way. Be patient and gentle with yourself, allowing for healing in your own unique way. Seeking professional counseling may be beneficial if you find yourself “stuck” in grief.

Become familiar with the normal experiences of grieving through reading, listening to podcasts and connecting with others who have also had a loss.

Let others “in”. Don’t isolate yourself from family and friends. Allow them to hear you and help you. Sharing with someone who has “been there” or joining a support group can be especially helpful and validating.

Take care of your body by having a check-up with your family physician and allowing for rest.

Tell and re-tell your story as a way to process and recall your experiences with the person who died. Writing in a journal can be a good way to release and process your feelings.

In early stages of grief, don’t force yourself to eat more than you want. As your appetite returns, eat a healthy, well-balanced diet. Drinking water is always good for your body.

Move your body – even a peaceful, quiet walk can help to relax and refocus.

Consider removing caffeine from your diet as a way to relieve nervousness. Also, be aware that alcohol is a depressant that can worsen feelings of sadness and interrupt normal sleep patterns.

Do something kind for yourself or your body – a good book, bath or massage can lift your spirits and release tension in your body.

Be aware that people grieve in different ways. Don’t measure your progress in handling grief against others. Be careful about unrealistic expectations you may have for yourself, or others.

Allow your tears to flow, knowing that this release can be therapeutic and will likely bring a feeling of relief.

Confront guilt and other difficult feelings by realizing you did the best you could.

Know that other kinds of changes and life stressors can intensify your feelings of distress and slow your movement with grief. Seek help with learning new skills and meeting your needs.

Find ways to bring balance into your life. Be playful, pray/meditate, or volunteer to help others.

William Worden described the journey of grief as tasks to be worked through to assist the grieving person with healing.

TASKS OF GRIEVING

- 1) To accept the reality of the loss.
- 2) To express grief’s pain & emotion.
- 3) To adjust to an environment where the deceased is missing.
- 4) To redirect emotional energy to other meaningful outlets in our outer world.

~From the ideas of William Worden (Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy)