

## ***Grief and Mourning***

### ***What is Grief?***

Everyone has experienced the death of a loved one at some point in our lives, and each of us has varied responses to that loss, called grieving. Often, grieving occurs in stages, and different emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are experienced during different part of the process. Remember that grief is a process and journey, not a single experience.

There is no “right way to grieve”: the stages of grieving are different for each person; you may have experienced some or all of the feelings, thoughts, actions described below, but not necessarily in the order that is here:

- **Shock, denial and numbness**
- **Anger and resentment**
- **Isolation and loneliness**
- **Bargaining and guilt**
- **Fear and anxiety** (*possibly about your own death*)
- **Sadness**
- **Helplessness**
- **Relief**
- **Acceptance**

Many grieverers sense the presence of the deceased person and even see or hear her/him. This is in fact, typical and not a sign that you are “crazy.”

Also, often, grieverers will search for meaning by asking, “Why did he or she die? How come the person died in this way and at this point in life?” You may be able to answer some questions more than others and it is okay if some are never resolved. Some people who are grieving take comfort in religious messages about life and death while others may find solace in secular, philosophical readings for relief and possible answers.

## ***For How Long Will I Grieve?***

There is no set time limit for grief. Some individuals are in bereavement for over a period of two years or even longer, while others may resolve their feelings in several months. These experiences are affected by many factors, such as the depth and length of relationship with the loved one.

Generally, the grieving process is complete when you have accepted that your loved one is with you only in spirit. For some people, the process does not end but becomes easier with time. You will know you are ready to move forward when you can devote the energy you once put in your loved one on a new place, activity or person.

## ***Coping with Grief by Mourning***

### **What is Mourning?**

While grief is your internal thoughts and feelings about the person you have lost, mourning is how you express those reactions to others. Mourning is an active process essential to healing from loss.

### **Healthy Ways to Mourn:**

- Gently confront the reality that the person is no longer living.
- Take care of yourself physically, mentally and emotionally. If you have a mental health problem such as depression, anxiety, or substance abuse, get treatment for it.
- Remember that both your positive (e.g., relief) and negative (anger, sadness) feelings are valid.
- Be compassionate to yourself if you have “grief bursts” in which your grief is more intense than at other times such as at holidays and at death anniversaries. It may be important to schedule positive and pleasurable activities during these times.
- Be patient with yourself and understand that you may feel childlike at times because of feelings of helplessness and dependency.
- Use relaxation strategies to cope with anxiety.
- Keep a journal (paper or electronic) to record your feelings and thoughts.

-Consider writing a letter to the person you have lost.

-Ask for and accept help from websites, books, family, friends, professors, religious/spiritual leaders, and/or mental health professionals.

-If you are a member of a religious organization, contact people there and possibly become more involved. Places of worship are often very supportive during times of loss.

-If certain family traditions (e.g., singing songs at holiday gatherings) are causing you discomfort, try to avoid them.

-Instead of trying to avoid thinking about the person whom you have lost, ask friends and family members to share their memories of that person using stories, photographs and other memorabilia.

-Create a memorial service by honoring the person's accomplishments and values. If possible, it may be helpful to plant a garden or make a donation in the person's name.

-Accept that your identity may have changed because of the loss. To illustrate, you may no longer be a wife but now a widow. You may have to assume responsibilities previously done by the deceased person. However, try not to take on (too many) new responsibilities.

Some Myths and Facts About Grief can be found at:

<http://childrensroom.org/resources/common-myths-facts-about-grief/>