



High Peaks Hospice & Palliative Care Inc.

Dignity, comfort and peace at the end of life.

Feelings of Grief



Death is a natural process in life. But no one is ever really ready for the flood of thoughts and emotions that can overwhelm us after a loved one dies. While these emotions are a normal response to a loved one's death, they can feel scary and stressful. The purpose of this publication is to help normalize your experience by identifying some of your experiences and offer suggestions for coping with them.

*What we have once enjoyed we can never lose. All that
we love deeply becomes a part of us.
-Helen Keller-*

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Feelings of Grief

Here are some of the thoughts and feelings you may have to navigate in the aftermath of your loved one's death.

Confusion

Is it difficult to make simple decisions, to concentrate and to follow through on things? Do you feel disorganized and make more mistakes? Confusion comes because you are using all your emotional energy to grieve and very little is left over for anything else.

Anxiety/Panic

Are you afraid of being alone? Do you worry about the future and fear that something else will happen to another loved one? Do you think you are "GOING CRAZY?" Panic is normal. Talking about your feelings, crying, or getting active with something may help to lessen the "panicky" feelings.

Depression

Depression is common in those who are grieving. It hurts so much. Sometimes you just don't care about anything. It takes effort to get out of bed, shop, or fix a simple meal. It is important to talk things over with a friend or someone who will listen.

Preoccupation

Your loved one who has died may be in your thoughts constantly. You may think of nothing but loss. You may even dream of your loved one or be focused on his or her face. Over time this will lessen.

Guilt

Many people are tortured by "if only" and "what if." We tend to blame ourselves for things we wish we had done differently for our loved one. Thoughts of guilt are normal but often not helpful. It is best not to push down the guilt. Talk about it until you can let it go. In time, you will realize you did the best you could. None of us is perfect. The past is behind us.

Anger

Anger is a very common emotion during grief. You may be angry with yourself or others, with the person who died or with God. You may also feel angry towards people who push you to accept your loss too soon or who pretend that nothing has happened. Anger is normal. It is often hard to admit to being angry. It is helpful to find safe ways to let out your anger, such as screaming in a private place, walking or swimming.

Loneliness

After the funeral, your relatives and friends may go on with their own lives, leaving you to deal with your grief alone. Co-workers, friends, neighbors and sometimes even family members may avoid you or change the subject. Some people withdraw because they are hurting and do not know how to help you. Support groups can be helpful.

Despair

"How can I go on?" You may come to the point where the agony seems too much. You can not bear it. You think you will not be able to survive. Talk to someone who has made it through grief.

Sadness

You miss your loved one and are upset they are no longer around. You may be unhappy, distressed or heartbroken.

Helplessness

"What am I going to do?" You may feel helpless about your feelings, your grief. You seem unable to help yourself cope or get better. You feel unable to help other family members. You may feel self-pity. Although you had no control over what happened, you may feel powerless at not having been able to prevent it.

Envy

You may feel jealous of people who still have their loved ones to enjoy.

Frustration

Many frustrations are a part of grief. "Why am I feeling so upset for so long?" You may become disappointed with yourself that you are not coping as well as you think you should. You are left with unfulfilled emotions, desires, and thoughts buzzing about in your head or sitting in your stomach.

Bitterness

Some bereaved people feel bitterness towards those whom they feel are responsible for their loved one's death. These bitter feeling should be worked on or the bitterness could last for many years. Bitterness drains you of energy and may be bad for your health.

Relief (Laughter)

Enjoy the relief that comes with laughter because the grief will return soon enough. You are not being disloyal to your loved one when you enjoy life.

*If I push down my feelings, I will give them the power;
If I accept them, I gain strength.*

You have experienced a loss in your life. Some of what you are feeling may seem strange or frightening. Many others have had similar feelings after loss. Even though you may not be able to name the feelings you are having, they belong to you and all of them are okay. There are healthy and unhealthy ways to deal with your feelings. It is helpful to learn the difference. Work on accepting your feelings, they have something to teach you. Over time you will be able to face all of what you are feeling and experiencing.

Remember: The pain of what you are feeling will eventually lessen.

This brief exercise can help you explore your feelings of grief.

Feelings I am most fearful or unsure of:

Feelings I am comfortable with:

Internet Web Sites: The internet offers access to a wealth of information on death, dying, and bereavement. This is a partial list of sites offering diverse grief information.

www.americanhospice.org You can find free publications here, including several workbooks for children.

www.centerforloss.com Alan Wolfelt's website, with an assortment of articles and resources for the bereaved.

www.centering.org A helpful site offering a variety of books and materials on death, dying, and bereavement.

www.compassionbooks.org A good resource for books and materials on death, dying, and bereavement.



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Coping with Grief

Coping with the loss of a loved one is tiring and difficult. This grief publication discusses:

- ✿ What is Coping?
- ✿ Ways to Cope with Loss
- ✿ Adjusting to Loss
- ✿ Suggestions for Helping Yourself Through Grief
- ✿ Relaxation Exercises

“Hope is like the sun, which as we journey toward it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us.”
Samuel Smiles



What is Coping?

Coping is a normal part of living with a loss. It is the struggle you go through every day to meet your own needs and the demands of your new situation. The struggle is to cope well, rather than in unhealthy and destructive ways. Coping in a good way might include maintaining your faith, finding value in being around others, or just doing better than you did yesterday.

Ways to Cope with Loss

Everyone reacts differently to loss. It is important to find ways to cope that will work for you. Here are some simple suggestions. Check off the ones you already do, and underline the ones that sound interesting to you.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Find a grief buddy | <input type="checkbox"/> Create a memory garden |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Read a good book | <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule something that gives you pleasure each day |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Soak in the tub | <input type="checkbox"/> Hug someone you feel safe with |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take a walk | <input type="checkbox"/> Take time for rest and relaxation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to music | <input type="checkbox"/> Stay fluid: drink a lot of water |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meditate | <input type="checkbox"/> Find some safe anger outlets |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Make a memory scrapbook | <input type="checkbox"/> Do something thoughtful for someone else |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Start a project | |
-

Adjusting to Loss

Acknowledging that someone you love has died is a painful process which does not fit any easy, quick, or efficient timetable. Gradually and gently confronting the reality that someone you care about will never physically come back into your life again requires time, and is best managed with patience and compassion for yourself. You may move back and forth between protesting and encountering the reality of the death. One moment the reality of the loss may be tolerable; another moment it may be unbearable. Your pain will probably ebb and flow for months, even years. Embracing it when it washes over you will require patience, support and strength. A recurrence of pain does not mean you are going backward; it means that you are adjusting to your loss at ever deeper levels.

Suggestions for Helping Yourself through Grief

- ✿ **Accept your grief:** Remember it is a natural healing process.
- ✿ **Learn about grief:** Understanding grief can help you know that what you are going through is normal.
- ✿ **Write about your loss:** Keeping a journal is not for everyone, but it can be powerful in helping people to heal.
- ✿ **Accept your feelings:** Grief has many feelings, some very strong. Accept them, and they will help you learn about yourself and the meaning of your loss.
- ✿ **Pace yourself, grief takes energy:** A slower pace mixed with periods of play and mild exercise can help you heal.
- ✿ **Cry about your loss:** Tears can relieve a lot of pressure. Learn to trust your body's need to cry and not to cry.
- ✿ **Involve yourself in work or meaningful activities:** It can help maintain direction, control, and purpose, and it can occupy your mind.
- ✿ **Think about your loss:** Relive experiences in your thoughts.
- ✿ **Talk about your loss:** There is more release in talking about your loss. You may need to tell the same stories over and over as part of your healing process.
- ✿ **Do not be afraid to have fun:** Laughter is a good medicine.
- ✿ **Take care of your health after your loss:** Do your best to eat right and get enough rest. If you are due for a physical exam or have put off a health screening, make an appointment. Exercise can release a surprising amount of tension, anger or frustration.

Relaxation Exercises

These exercises can be used to help you take a break from the hard work of grieving.

The Falling Leaf Instructions: Stare at a spot on the wall across from you. Visualize a leaf on that spot. With each slow, deep breath, count backward from 20 to 1 as you watch the leaf very slowly drift to the ground. At 1, the leaf reaches the ground, and you are deeply relaxed.

The Bobbing Boat Instructions: Imagine yourself adrift in a boat on a warm sunny day. The gentle breeze rocks the boat in a rhythm of its own. With the warm sun beaming down on you, you can feel your stress easing away with each lapping wave. Each breath you take is filled with the scent of the pine forest ringing the shores. Mountains rise to greet the skies, and you are free to linger as long you like with beaming sun, lapping waves, bobbing boat, and pine-scented fresh air.

Journaling Exercise

Drawing a Grief Map Instructions: Start with a clean sheet of paper. Make a circle at the center of the page and label it MY GRIEF: this circle represents your thoughts and feelings since the death. Now draw lines radiating out of this circle and label each line with a thought or feeling that has contributed to your grief. Are there any stormy issues on your map? Mark it with double or triple rings and a lightning zigzag. Are there any islands of relief anywhere? Draw those in and label them with the source of your relief. Remember: you are not being graded for your artistic ability. Just do it!

*Adapted from Alan Wolfelt in
The Understanding Your Grief Journal*

Support Group

Our bereavement support group meets the 2nd Thursday of the month from 3 to 4:30 pm at the Hand House in Elizabethtown. Call Joan at 546-9850 for details.

Next Issue:

**Different
Bonds,
Different
Grief**



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