



# High Peaks Hospice & Palliative Care Inc.

*Dignity, comfort and peace at the end of life.*

## What is Grief?



Welcome to our grief information series. Over the next twelve months we want to provide you with material about the grief journey that you are now on. Each of our mailings will address specific issues that you may encounter along the way. Topics in this publication include:

*Symptoms of Grief*

*Four Rules of Grief*

*Moving Through Your Grief*

*A Suggested Reading List*

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## Symptoms of Grief

- |                                  |                                       |                                    |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ⊗ Shock, disbelief, numbness     | ⊗ Headaches, fatigue                  | ⊗ No appetite, weight loss         |
| ⊗ Sleeplessness, restlessness    | ⊗ Difficulty concentrating            | ⊗ Memory loss, confusion           |
| ⊗ Difficulty organizing thoughts | ⊗ Lump in throat, crying jags         | ⊗ Racing thoughts                  |
| ⊗ Angry, irritable, resentful    | ⊗ Second guessing difficult decisions | ⊗ Profound loneliness or emptiness |



## The Four Rules of Grief

While much has been written about grief, it may be helpful for you to focus on these four simple rules as you journey through your loss.

### **1. Grief has no timetable.**

In spite of what family and friends may say, you may not have recovered from your loss in three months, six months, twelve months or longer.

### **2. Grief is different for each person who experiences it.**

Because no two relationships are exactly alike, no two people grieve exactly alike. Even when two people lose the same person, their experiences of that loss can be very different.

### **3. You have to experience your loss before you can move on.**

To heal in grief is to become whole again, to integrate your grief into your self and to learn to continue your changed life with fullness and meaning.

### **4. Be patient with yourself.**

Acknowledging that someone you love has died is a process, not an event. Embracing this painful reality takes time and energy. Allow yourself to take as much time as you need.

## Moving Through Your Grief

To successfully move through your grief, you need to take an active role in your own healing process. Various phases of the journey are described below.

- When you experience trauma, one of your first reactions is to shut down or go numb. This cushions you from overwhelming feelings during your early grief. Even an expected death is a shock. A part of you may feel that the loss is unreal, a nightmare or a terrible mistake. How long it will take you to come out of your numbness depends on the circumstances surrounding the loss.
- As the numbness wears off, you begin to realize what the loss is going to mean to you. This explains why many bereaved people feel worse after a few months have gone by. The reality of this loss starts to sink in. A part of you may still be looking for your loved one to come back into your life.
- You allow yourself to experience the pain of your grief in all of its forms. It is important to give yourself permission to talk about and feel your pain. It is common to have strong physical reactions to grief. Because of the stress you have been under, it may be a good idea to get a physical exam in order to relieve fears about your own health.
- You realize how your life has changed and you begin to develop new roles, routines and skills in response to the changes. Grieving the loss of your routines is an important part of healing. It is helpful to make as few changes as possible elsewhere in your life, when you are faced with a loss. It is also important to be gentle and patient with yourself as you assume new roles and responsibilities.
- You eventually come to a time when you choose to say “Yes” to life again. Grieving can be terribly hard, exhausting work, and can demand much of your energy. When enough healing has occurred, you no longer need to focus as much of your energy on your loss. At this point, you find you have more energy to invest in the life ahead of you. You come to understand that it is possible for you to have a happy and full life again, though it will be different from your life before your loss.

Suggested Reading List

*Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope...*

By Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D., Compassion Press, 2003

*Men Don't Cry... Women Do: Transcending Gender Stereotypes of Grief*

By Martin and Doka, Taylor Francis, 2000

*Grieving: How to Go On Living When Someone Dies*

By Therese Rando, Lexington Press, 1998

Next Issue:      Feelings  
                         of Grief

Information for this grief publication was adapted from the following sources: *How to Design & Facilitate Grief Support Groups* by Kim Logan; *Palliative Care Patient and Family Counseling Manual* by Aspen Reference Group.



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