

feelings and the experiences before we can begin to accept what has happened. Sometimes in our grief process, we feel as though we may be burdening our family and friends with our need to talk. If this feeling occurs, seeking help from a counselor is probably a good idea. Perhaps only with someone outside of the circle of family and friends can we allow ourselves to talk about all of the feelings we are having.

- **Return To Life** - We each have our own way of surviving losses and our own timetable. However, as in recovering from any trauma, physical or mental, a progressive return to our usual life of work, school, family, and friends is most important. Perhaps outlining a schedule of the day-to-day tasks can help us to structure our day and get us moving back into a normal routine. Reconnecting with friends, going back to work or school, and beginning to pick up the threads of our lives can help us to deal with feelings of numbness, lethargy, and paralysis. Attending to our physical needs is essential during this time. Get enough sleep. Go to bed a bit earlier and sleep a bit later. Plan your meals so that you are eating properly. Work some exercise into your daily routine. Remember, just as our emotional self is affected by the loss of a loved one, so is our physical self.

Length of Grieving

Although there are no timetables for determining when grieving is over, many experts agree that it is not unusual for the grieving process to take at least a year. This varies depending on your relationship with the deceased, amount of support, and other personal factors. Remember it takes about a year to go through all of the birthdays, holidays, special events, and other important dates that will be experienced for the first time without the loved one. Though the intensity of the loss may ebb and flow during this period of time, grief lasting for at least a year is not uncommon and can be expected. Generally, the longer a close relationship had existed before the death, the longer the recovery process takes.

Complicated Grief

Sometimes the normal grieving process becomes more complicated. Sleep and appetite disturbances, reduced joy in previously enjoyable activities, and marked preoccupation with thoughts about the deceased may

be signs of increased difficulty in dealing with the death. Sometimes our feeling of loss may seem so tragic and pervasive that we believe we can no longer go on. Regardless of the specific feeling, if you have thoughts of hopelessness, or are feeling contrary to the way that you think you should feel, you should consult with a mental health professional, who can give you an opportunity to talk about your feelings and help with the grief process.

Things to Remember

Try to

- Talk to others who have experienced loss.
- Speak of the meaning of the loss to you, the ways in which you will miss the deceased.
- Seek support directly from those that are able to give it. A hug may be important.
- Stay with a routine, stick to a schedule, even if you feel you are just going through the motions.
- Recognize the feelings for what they are rather than why they are. Knowing what the feeling is can help in dealing with it.
- Use writing/art/music to let out feelings and thoughts.
- Be forgiving and patient with yourself. It is all right to make mistakes or lose your concentration.
- Be good to yourself. Take the rest you need, the walk you enjoy, the gift you would like.
- Give yourself time. Time does heal, but how long it takes is an individual thing.
- Seek guidance from a source that can offer you both wisdom and empathy.

Also, try to:

- Not make major life decisions too quickly.
- Not numb your pain with depressive chemicals such as alcohol or other drugs.
- Not deny your feelings.
- Not isolate or hide out from yourself and others.
- Not expect every day to get better. Instead, realize that you will have ups and downs, good days and bad days.

Adapted from: How to Survive the Loss of a Loved One, Melba Colgrove.

Grief & Loss

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Grief is painful and takes time. It is a natural process, an intense fundamental emotion, and a universal experience which makes us human. Learn more about grief and how to care for yourself during this important time.

GRIEF & LOSS

The death of someone we love is a part of life that is difficult. Learning to survive the feelings of sadness and loss is a process that is normal and usually time-limited. The process involves both emotional and behavioral reactions, and takes us through the initial response of shock and sadness, through acceptance and understanding, and eventually to the rebuilding of our lives. There are many ways, some better than others, in which people learn to adjust to the death of a loved one. This brochure will help you understand your grief and give you some ideas about how you may be able to help yourself through the grieving process.

THE TASKS OF GRIEVING:

The death of someone we care about most often means the loss of a valued personal relationship. In response to this loss, we experience many physical, emotional, and behavioral reactions that we call grieving. Grieving is necessary and natural. It is important to understand the tasks of grieving.

- Accepting the reality of the loss - This first task is often difficult because of the sense of shock and numbness we experience. It is common to maintain hope that somehow "all of this is a mistake" and that the deceased is not really dead. As we struggle to accept the reality of the death, we may even misidentify others and believe that we have seen the deceased individual. Typically, this feeling that the death is somehow not real tends to lessen, although there may be some recurrences as the process continues.
- Experiencing the pain of grief - The feelings of loss tend to be very painful, and often we may feel like avoiding the intensity of these difficult emotions. It is as if by not experiencing the pain we can somehow avoid the reality that someone we care about is dead. The reality, however, is that we cannot avoid the pain of grief forever. We will experience confusion, sadness, dismay, yearning, and probably anger. We may even experience physical symptoms such as palpitations, nausea, dizziness, tightness in the throat, and digestive problems. Sadness and an overwhelming sense of loss may be fairly pervasive feelings during the grief process.

Expressing the sadness is often difficult. While some of us may be able to cry, others may feel a need to hold in their feelings. The difficulty in holding in feelings is that we can do nothing about them except hold them. In essence, we put our emotional life on hold, which prevents us from healing. On the other hand, by expressing our feelings, (by crying, talking about feelings), we can begin to move forward and to heal from the loss. Depending on the level of closeness, the death can arouse a sense of anger or bitterness. We may become angry at God, at the unfairness of the world, at the deceased, and even at ourselves. We may question our own behavior and be angry for not having been the "right kind" of son, daughter, friend, partner, brother, or sister. All of this anger is normal, and can be accompanied by a tremendous sense of guilt. Part of the grief process is our ability (over time) to recognize and resolve any anger and/or guilt.

- Adjusting to life without the deceased - This will entail a variety of emotional and behavioral changes. A sense of despair, disorganization, and anxiety may emerge, and taking care of everyday tasks may become difficult. New behaviors and skills may need to be developed and that may be distressing. Yet redefining these experiences in a way that promotes the healing needed to fulfill these new roles and tasks appears to ease this adjustment and is an important part of the process.
- Emotionally detaching from the deceased and investing that emotional energy into other relationships - The final task of mourning and the task that is the most difficult. This task will be done in the time that is right for you. Most of us feel guilty at the thought of detaching from the deceased. We feel we are not being loyal or faithful to what was. This does not mean we are abandoning our memories and thoughts, or that we love the deceased any less. It does mean that we realize that there are other people to be loved and that loving others does not take away from the love one has for the deceased.

When the tasks of grief are accomplished, we will find that we can remember the deceased without pain, though may still experience some sadness.

What to Do to Accomplish the Tasks of Grief

Moving through the grief tasks can sometimes be eased by finding support from our social and cultural practices as well as from perhaps more personal resources. Seeking support and using these resources can help us recover from the death of a loved one.

- Participate in Social and Cultural Rituals - Cultural practices seem to acknowledge the wisdom of expressing grief, though not all cultures handle this expression in the same way. Many cultures surround the death of one of its members with elaborate ceremony while others acknowledge the loss more privately. The cultural rituals for dealing with death (e.g., wakes, funerals, etc.) seem designed to offer us an opportunity to express our sadness in the socially and culturally accepted manner. They can give other people the opportunity to comfort us and show concern as a way to remind us that we have other loving connections, that life goes on, and that we are not alone in our feelings of loss and grief. Participating in the ceremony and ritual of bereavement also seems to aid family and friends in the adjustment to such a personal loss. Some families and friends choose to create their own rituals to commemorate the birthday or day of death of their loved one. A visit to the gravesite, lighting a candle, and special gatherings are ways bereaved individuals can support one another and share memories.
- Find and Use Support Systems - Finding the support of family and friends and sharing the pain of loss with them can make a tremendous difference. Sometimes when someone dies, family members or friends have difficulty talking with each other about the death. This is partly due to the painful feelings and also partly due to the belief that somehow talking will "upset" others even more. Thus family members or friends may feel cut off from each other at precisely the time when they need to feel close and be supportive of each other. Individuals who have survived the death of a loved one consistently stress the importance of talking, remembering, crying, and sharing feelings with their friends or family. Typically, we need to go over and over the