

WHAT IS GRIEF

TABLE OF CONTENTS

What is Grief	2
Why do We Grieve Differently.....	4
Past Experience.....	4
Relationship with the Deceased	5
Circumstances Surrounding the Death.....	5
Influences in the Present	6
Conclusion.....	6
Common Characteristics of Grief.....	7
Factors that Influence the Ability to Cope with Losses	8
Avoidance.....	9
Coping	10
General Coping Strategies	10
Some Keys to Working through Grief	11
The Grieving Person’s Bill of Rights	12
Suggestions for Helping Yourself through Grief	14
Suggestions for Handling Guilt.....	15
The Tasks of Grief.....	16
What a Support Group can Offer You.....	17

WHAT IS GRIEF?

"Grief is the intense emotion that floods life when a person's inner security system is shattered by an acute loss, usually associated with the death of someone important in his/her life.

In more personal terms, grief is a young widow who must find a way to bring up her three children, alone. Grief is the angry reaction of a man so filled with shocked uncertainty and confusion that he strikes out at the nearest person. Grief is the little old lady who goes to the funeral of a stranger and does some unfinished business of her own feeling by crying her eyes out there; she is weeping for herself, for the event she is sure will come, and for which she has so little help in preparing herself.

Grief is a mother walking daily to a nearby cemetery to stand quietly alone for a few moments before she goes on about the tasks of the day; she knows that part of her is in the cemetery, just as part of her is in her daily work. Grief is the deep sympathy one person has for another when he wants to do all he can to help resolve a tragic experience. Grief is the silent, knifelike terror and sadness that comes a hundred times a day, when you start to speak to someone who is no longer there.

Grief is the emptiness that comes when you eat alone after eating with another for years. Grief is the desperate longing for another whose loss you cannot learn to endure. Grief is teaching yourself how to bed wishing that things were different when you know they are not and never will be again. Grief is a whole cluster of adjustments, apprehensions, and uncertainties that strike life in its forward progress and make it difficult to reorganize and redirect the energies of life.

Grief is always more than sorrow. Bereavement is the event in personal history that triggers the emotion of grief. Mourning is the process by which the powerful emotion is slowly and painfully brought under control. But when doctors speak of grief they are focusing on the raw feelings that are at the center of whole process that engages the person in adjusting to changed circumstances. They are speaking of the deep fears of the mourner, of his prospects of loneliness, and of the obstacles he must face as he finds a new way of living."

--Edgar N. Jackson
You and Your Grief

"GRIEF: The process of psychological, social, and somatic reactions to the perception of loss. This implies that grief is (a) manifested in each of the psychological, social, and somatic realms; (b) a continuing development involving many changes; (c) a natural, expectable reaction (in fact, the absence of it is abnormal in most cases); (d) the reaction to the experience of many kinds of loss, not necessarily death alone; and (e) based upon the unique, individualistic perception of loss by the griever, that is, it is not necessary to have the loss recognized or validated by others for the person to experience grief."

--Therese A. Rando
Grief, Dying, and Death: Clinical

"There is a terrible craving. Insatiable, never ending. It's like that feeling of being hungry for something but not knowing what it is. But this is deeper, more pervasive, and more elusive. But I think I know what it is. It's a craving for Margaret".

--Larry Anderson
P.I. Columnist

“Grief and pain are the price we humans have to pay for the love and total commitment we have for another person. The more we love, the more we are hurt when we lose the object of our love. But if we are honest with ourselves, would we have it any other way?”

--C. S. Lewis
A Grief Observed

Love—Gratitude

The agony is so great
And yet I WILL STAND IT.
Had I not loved so very much
I would not hurt so much
But goodness knows I will not
Want to diminish that precious love
By one fraction of an ounce.
I will hurt and I will be grateful to the hurt
For it bears witness to the depth of our meanings
And for that I will be
Eternally grateful.

--Author Unknown

C. S. Lewis also likens grief to one who had lost a leg thru amputation. It is something you never get over. There will be recurrent pains, the whole way of life will be changed, and you will always know that it is gone. He says “At present I am learning to get about on crutches. Perhaps presently I will be given a wooden leg. But I shall never be biped again.” (A Grief Observed)

“Grief is integral part of the process and experience of life. No human being exists who is immune to loss and the resultant dynamics of grief. As a matter of fact, to a lesser or greater degree, loss and grief are virtually an every-day occurrence for most of us.”

--William A. Miller
When Going to Pieces Holds You
Together

“Grief process is a rite of passage. A time to bid farewell to the past and open oneself to the coming future. It helps us to let go of what is no longer with us, to come to terms with what was and move on.”

--Nina Petruilius,
Grief Lecturer

“We are in grief. All have experienced loss. Even if your loved ones are still alive, there is a place within of disappointment and loss because we live in a world where everything changes.”

--Steven Levine
Who Dies?

Our grief is the inability to accept change. To cling to the old and that which is no longer. Grief has a purposeful, positive outcome. Despite the negative connotations associated with the words “death” and “grief”, they are passages for further growth. If we can change our attitude about them and see them in this light then grief becomes a healing growing process. One which all of us at one time or another must go through and those who love us must go through it when we die. As C. S. Lewis said, “It’s the price we pay for love.”

WHY WE GRIEVE DIFFERENTLY

We accept without question uniqueness in the physical world...fingerprints, snowflakes, etc. But we often refuse that same reality in our emotional world. This understanding is needed especially in the grieving process.

No two people will ever grieve the same way, with the same intensity or for the same duration.

It is important to understand this basic truth. Only then can we accept our own manner of grieving and be sensitive to another's response to loss. Only then are we able to seek out the nature of support we need for our own personalized journey back to wholeness and be able to help others on their own journey.

Not understanding the individuality of grief could complicate and delay whatever grief we might experience from our own loss. It could also influence us should we attempt to judge the grieving of others—even those we might most want to help.

Each of us is a unique combination of diverse past experiences; we each have a different personality style; we have various ways of coping with stress situations; and our own attitudes influence how we accept the circumstances around us. We are also affected by the role and relationship that each person in a family system had with the departed, by circumstances surrounding the death and by influences in the present.

PAST EXPERIENCE

Past experiences from childhood on have a great impact on how we are able to handle loss in the present.

What other losses have we faced in our childhood, adolescence, adulthood? How frightening were these experiences? Was there good support? Were feelings allowed to be expressed in a secure environment? Has there been a chance to recover and heal from these earlier losses?

What other life stresses have been going on prior to this recent loss? Has there been a move to a new area? Were there financial difficulties, problems or illness with another member of the family or with our self?

What has our previous mental health history been like? Have we had bouts with depression? Have we harbored suicidal thoughts? Have we experienced a nervous breakdown? Have we been treated with medication or been hospitalized?

How has our family cultural influences conditioned us to respond to loss and the emotions of grief (stoic father, emotional mother, etc.)?

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DECEASED

No outsider is able to determine the special bond that connects two people regardless of the relationship, role or length of time the relationship has been in existence.

Our relationship with the deceased has a great deal to do with the intensity and duration of our grief.

What was the relationship? Was the deceased a spouse? A child? A parent? A friend? A sibling?

How strong was the attachment to the deceased? Was it a close, dependent relationship, or intermittent and independent? What was the degree of ambivalence (the love/hate balance) in the relationship?

It is not only the person but the role that that person played in our life which is also lost.

How major was that role? Was that person the sole breadwinner, the driver, the handler of financial matters, the only one who could fix a decent dinner? Was that person a main emotional support, an only friend? How depended were we on the role that person filled?

CIRCUMSTANCE SURROUNDING THE DEATH

The circumstances surrounding the death, i.e. how the death occurred, are extremely important in determining how we are going to come to an acceptance of the loss.

Was the loss in keeping with the laws of Nature as when a person succumbs to old age? Or, was order thrown into chaos as when a parent lives to see a child die?

What warnings were there that there would be a loss? Was there time to prepare, time gradually to come to terms with the inevitable? Or did death come so suddenly that there was no anticipation of its arrival?

Do we feel that this death could have been prevented or forestalled? How much responsibility am I taking for this death?

Do we feel that the deceased accomplished what he or she was meant to fulfill in this lifetime? Was their life full and rewarding? How much was left unsaid or undone between ourselves and the deceased? Does the extent of unfinished business foster a feeling of guilt?

INFLUENCES IN THE PRESENT

We have looked at the past, at the relationship, and how the loss occurred. Now we see how the influences in the present can impact how we are finally going to come to terms with a current loss.

Age and sex are important factors.

Are we young enough and resilient enough to bounce back? Are we old enough and wise enough to accept the loss and grow with the experience? Can our life be rebuilt again? What opportunities does life offer now? Is health a problem?

What are the secondary losses that are the result of this death? Loss of income? Home? Family break-up? What other stresses or crises are present?

Our personality, present stability of mental health and coping behavior play a significant role in our response to the loss.

What kind of role expectations do we have for ourselves? What are those imposed from friends, relatives, and others? Are we expected to be the "strong one"? Or is it alright for us to break down and have someone else take care of us? Or are we going to try to assume an unrealistic attempt to satisfy everyone's expectations? Or are we going to withdraw from the entire situation?

What is there in our social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds that give us strength and comfort? What role do rituals play in our recovery? Do our religious or philosophical beliefs bring comfort or add sorrow and guilt? What kind of social support is there in our lives during this emotional upheaval?

CONCLUSION

When a person who is a part of our life dies, understanding the uniqueness of this loss can guide us in finding the support we will need and to recognize when help should come from outside family or friends.

When the loss is experienced by someone we would like to help or by someone under our care, this same understanding is essential. Thus we can guard against a temptation to compare or to judge their grief responses to our own. The awareness of those factors which affect the manner, intensity and duration of grief should enable us to guide the grieving person in seeking those forms of support suggested by the nature of their loss and the unique way it affects them.

--Jinny Tesik, M.A.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF GRIEF

There are a variety of feelings and behaviors which can be experienced in the grief process. Not everyone will respond to loss in the same way. It is helpful to know that the following characteristics can be a normal part of the grief experience.

FEELINGS:

Shock, numbness, sense of unreality, anger, irritability, guilt, self reproach, sadness, depression, anxiety, fear, hysteria, helplessness, vulnerability, low self-esteem, loneliness, relief, feelings of being crazy, mood swings, intensity of all feelings.

PHYSICAL SENSATIONS:

Hollowness in the stomach, tightness in the chest and throat, dry mouth, over sensitivity to noise, dizziness, headaches, shortness of breath, weakness in the muscles, lack of energy, fatigue, excess of nervous energy, heart pounding, heavy or empty feeling in body and limbs, hot or cold flashes, skin sensitivity, stomach & intestinal upsets, increase in physical illnesses.

THOUGHT PATTERNS:

Disbelief, sense of unreality, preoccupation, confusion, lack of ability to concentrate, seeing, hearing, feeling the presence of the deceased, thoughts of self destruction, problems with decision making.

BEHAVIORS:

Appetite and sleep disturbances, absent minded behavior, social withdrawal, avoiding reminders of the loss, dreams of the loss, searching and calling out for the deceased, restlessness, sighing, crying, visiting places that are reminders of the loss, treasuring, carrying objects that belonged to the deceased, change in sexual activities, need for touch, hugs, contacts with others, increased sensitivity to positive and negative attention, picking up mannerisms of the deceased, exhibiting symptoms of deceased's illness.

SOCIAL CHANGES:

Either an increased desire for support of close friends or a withdrawal from friends and family, increased dependency of others, a need for acting "normal" around others, a need for relationships apart from those related to grief, self-absorbed (no energy for interest in others), marital difficulties, especially with the death of a child. Role changes, role reversals, change in social patterns and status, hypersensitivity to topics of loss, need for rituals.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE ABILITY TO COPE WITH LOSSES

Many factors affect the intensity and duration of grief. Each person's grief will be determined by a unique combination of psychological, physiological and social qualities.

INFLUENCES FROM THE PAST:

- Childhood experiences – especially losses of significant others.
- Adolescent and adult experiences of loss and the regency of such losses.
- The resolution of those losses.
- Previous mental health problems-bouts with depression, suicide attempts. Previous physical health problems, life crises or changes prior to this loss.

NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP:

- Kinship (spouse, child, parent, etc.)
- Family of choice
- The role the deceased occupied
- Strength of attachment
- Length of relationship
- Degree of dependency
- Intensity of ambivalence (love/hate)
- The unique nature and meaning of the loss

HOW THE LOSS OCCURRED:

- Circumstances surrounding the loss
- Timeliness (when in life-cycle did loss occur)
- Previous warnings
- Preparation for bereavement (anticipatory grief)
- The bereaved perception of preventability
- The bereaved perception of the deceased's fulfillment in life
- Amount of unfinished business

INFLUENCES IN THE PRESENT:

- Sex
- Age
- Role expectations (self-imposed or other-imposed)
 - The strong one
 - The expressive one
 - The detached one
- Coping behaviors, personality, and mental health
- Social, cultural, ethnic, and religious/philosophical background including rituals
- The number, type, and quality of secondary losses resulting from the loss
- The presence of other stresses or crises
- Amount of social support or isolation
- Present health and ability to care properly for oneself
- Emergent life opportunities

These factors make grief a very personal, individual process, and one that should not be compared with another's grief. Added guilt feelings arise when one attempts to compare his grief with another's. Someone is always grieving too much or not enough if one tries to compare.

(Note: Parts of this section were taken from Theresa Rando's book, "Grief, Dying and Death: Clinical Intervention for Caregivers.")

AVOIDANCE

Suppress

Replace

Minimize

Somaticize

Work

Shop

Eat

Alcohol and drugs

Travel

Crusade

Spiritualize

Litigate

Rage/Blame

Displace

Inquire

Clown

Impulsive behavior

Isolate

Guilt

COPING

Coping is what we do about a problem in order to obtain relief from a distressing feeling.

Coping doesn't consist of just gradually feeling less distressed. It is important to know what we DID to contribute to that relief.

Coping is an everyday occurrence. We seldom pay attention to it unless we are dealing with a problem which provides us with on-going distress.

Coping is a process combining:

Perception – recognizing a problem from which we seek relief.

Performance – what we do or do not do about the problem constitutes how we cope with it.

Outcome – which offers no permanent guarantee about the long-term effectiveness of the coping strategy.

Appraisal of the situation.

Readjustment of our coping strategies.

GENERAL COPING STRATEGIES

RATIONAL INQUIRY – seek more information.

MUTUALITY – share concern and talk with others.

AFFECT REVERSAL – laugh it off, make light of the situation.

SUPPRESSION – try to forget, to put out of your mind.

DISPLACEMENT/REDIRECTION – do other things for distraction.

CONFRONT – take firm action based on present understanding.

REDEFINE/REVISE – accept but find something positive/favorable.

PASSIVE ACCEPTANCE – submit to the inevitable; fatalism.

IMPULSIVITY – do something, anything no matter how impractical or reckless.

IF X THEN Y – consider or negotiate feasible alternatives.

LIFE THREATS – reduce tension with excessive drink, drugs, danger.

DISENGAGEMENT – withdraw into isolation, get away.

EXTERNALIZE, PROJECT – blame someone/something.

COOPERATIVE COMPLIANCE – see direction, do what you're told.

MORAL MASOCHISM – blame yourself, sacrifice or atone.

SOME KEYS TO WORKING THROUGH GRIEF

1. **SHARE YOUR GRIEF** – demonstrate your grief to others so that they have an honest understanding of how you are feeling. Share your grief – not asking for any reaction from others, but getting relief from getting the grief out.
2. **IDENTIFY YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM** – look around you and find people who are supportive of you and your feelings. They will form the nucleus of what helps you through grief.
3. **ACCEPT YOUR FEELINGS** – you are entitled to feel badly or feel good, feel anger or guilt because you lost someone very important to you.
4. **EAT AT LEAST ONE GOOD MEAL PER DAY** – be sure that you nurture your body at least once per day with a balanced meal.
5. **BE KIND TO YOURSELF** – live each day and give yourself a good feeling for having made it through each day. Discover what simple things you can do for yourself – to feel good – hot baths, a hot cup of cocoa, a good book, ten minutes to yourself, etc.
6. **LOOK OUT FOR YOUR NEEDS** – learn some assertive skills to stick up for yourself. Learn to say no without risking the loss of friends you need.
7. **KEEP A JOURNAL** – each day, log your feelings so that you can begin to chart your growth. The journal can give you an outlet for expressing your innermost feelings.
8. **GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO CHANGE YOUR ROUTINE** – you may want to change where you eat, you may want to change the time you go to bed, change the furniture around, the places you go, or you may want to stay away from places or people that upset you until you are feeling better.
9. **IDENTIFY THE BAD TIMES FOR YOU** – certain times of the day or week are particularly uncomfortable – the weekends are often discussed as a time when family gets together. When you know that you are approaching the time of day or week that's uncomfortable for you, plan ahead to cover the bad times with an activity or involvement with people you enjoy.

THE GRIEVING PERSON'S BILL OF RIGHTS

Written by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.
For Batesville Management Services
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Though you should reach out to others as you do the work of mourning, you should not feel obligated to accept the unhelpful responses you may receive from some people. You are the one who is grieving, and as such, you have certain "rights" no one should try to take away from you.

The following list is intended both to empower you to heal and to help you decide how others can and cannot help. This is not to discourage you from reaching out to others for help, but rather to assist you in distinguishing useful responses from hurtful ones.

1. *You have the right to experience your own unique grief.* No one else will grieve in exactly the same way you do. So, when you turn to others for help, don't allow them to tell what you should or should not be feeling.
2. *You have the right to talk about your grief.* Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk as much as you want, as often as you want, about your grief.
3. *You have the right to feel a multitude of emotions.* Confusion, disorientation, fear, guilt and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey. Others may try to tell you that feeling angry, for example, is wrong. Don't take these judgmental responses to heart. Instead, find listeners who will accept your feelings without condition.
4. *You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits.* Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel ready to do.
5. *You have the right to experience grief "attacks."* Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but is normal and natural. Find someone who understands and will let you talk it out.
6. *You have the right to make use of ritual.* The funeral ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. More important, the funeral is a way for you to mourn. If others tell you that rituals such as these are silly or unnecessary, don't listen.
7. *You have the right to embrace your spirituality.* If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you feel angry at God, find someone to talk with who won't be critical of your feelings of hurt and abandonment.

8. *You have the right to search for meaning.* You may find yourself asking, “Why did he or she die? Why this way? Why now?” Some of your questions may have answers, but some may not. And watch out for the clichéd responses some people may give you. Comments like, “It was God’s will” or “Think of what you have to be thankful for” are not helpful and you do not have to accept them.
9. *You have the right to treasure your memories.* Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. You will always remember. Instead of ignoring your memories, find others with whom you can share them.
10. *You have the right to move toward your grief and heal.* Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly. Remember, grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you must forge that the death of someone loved changes your life forever.

SUGGESTIONS FOR HELPING YOURSELF THROUGH GRIEF

This title is not meant to indicate that others in our lives do not help us through grief. We do need the help of relatives and friends, and may need the help of Professional Counseling. At the same time, it is important for us to make the effort to help ourselves. Remember, that a lot of energy will be used for healing. Treat yourself with the same care and affection that you would offer to a good friend in the same situation. Most of us are aware of “LOVE THY NEIGHBOR” – we forget the part – “AS YOU LOVE YOURSELF.” Not all suggestions will be helpful to everyone. Grief has its unique side. Choose the ideas that appeal to you.

1. Go Gently. Don't rush too much. Your body needs energy for repair.
2. Don't take on new responsibilities right away. Don't over-extend yourself. Keep decision making to a minimum.
3. Accept help and support when offered.
4. Ask for help. Our family and friends can't read mind. It is very important to find someone who cares, understands, and with whom you may talk freely. It's okay to need comforting.
5. Seek the support of others...invite a relative/friend for dinner or overnight. Also consider meeting new people.
6. Be patient with yourself. Healing takes time.
7. Lean into the pain. It cannot be outrun. Let the grief/healing process run its full course.
8. Through this emotional period, it is okay to feel depressed. Crying does make you feel better.
9. If Sundays, Holiday, etc., are especially difficult times, schedule activities that you find particularly comforting into these time periods.
10. Seek the help of a Counselor or Clergy if grief is unresolved.
11. Try to get adequate rest. Go to bed earlier. Avoid caffeine in coffee, tea, and colas.
12. Good nutrition is important to help the healing process. (Decrease junk food and try to eat a balanced meal.)
13. Keep a journal. It is a good way to understand what you are feeling/thinking. Hopefully when you re-read it later you will see that you are getting better.
14. Read – there are many helpful books on grief. If grief is understood, it is a little easier to handle.
15. Moderate exercise helps (walking, tennis, swimming, etc.)

SUGGESTIONS FOR HANDLING GUILT

1. If you do feel guilty, it is helpful to admit it – to yourself – to others who will listen and care.
2. Remember you are human. No one is perfect. There is so much that we tried to do. There are things we did not do. Accepting our imperfections aids us in working out our guilt.
3. Realize that living is a balance of good and bad.
4. If you feel guilty, ask yourself what things specifically are bothering you the most. Talk over your feelings of guilt with a trusted friend or professional or confess your guilt to God.
5. Telling the truth about why you feel guilty will help.
6. Forgive yourself; ask the forgiveness of your loved one and of God.
7. Try to realize what happened is past. There is nothing that you can do about it now.
8. Become determined to live life to the best of your ability.
9. God’s forgiveness should help us to begin to forgive ourselves.
10. You can learn from your guilt for the other people in your life. If appropriate, adopt a new lifestyle for the future. From past mistakes you may be able to change for the better.
11. Realize that sometimes you are powerless and that you can’t control everything that happens.
12. Realize that guilt is a normal part of grief and should ease with time.
13. If guilt is hindering your recovery, seek professional counseling. Don’t be afraid or embarrassed to talk about your feelings of guilt with those who have been trained to help.
14. Remember the special times that you had with your loved one who has died.
15. Consider that your loved one should not want you to continue to suffer from guilt and grief.
16. Remember there is not always an answer to “why” and you do not have to find somebody (yourself) or something to blame.
17. Be patient with yourself and remember you tried to do the best you could with what you knew at the time. Who can’t be more perfect?
18. If your faith is shaken, try to put your religious beliefs back together and find comfort in your religion.
19. Try writing about your thoughts/feelings of guilt.
20. Allow your family/friends to comfort/love you.
21. Find some purpose or meaning in your own life by helping others. Volunteer to help with the many phases of the Hope for Bereaved support groups. In helping others, you help yourself.
22. Try not to blame yourself for things that you did not know you were mishandling.
23. In The Bereaved Parent, author Harriett Schiff suggests that if we were intended to function with perfect hindsight our eyeballs would be in the back of our heads. Usually hindsight is not helpful since things can no longer be undone.
24. If appropriate use the “empty chair” dialogue. Place a chair in front of you and imagine your dead family member sitting there. Take this opportunity to express your feelings including those of guilt. This technique offers you the opportunity to focus on your guilt, to admit it, to understand it and deal with it. Remember the good times too.
25. Guilt should not be glossed over nor pushed down. Talk about your guilt until YOU can let it go.
26. Some things are beyond our handling, coping or correcting. Remember perfect parenting/partnership/friendship is a role beyond realistic capability.
27. It is helpful to remember I did the best I was able to do under the circumstances...I had no training and by trial and error I did the best I could. Remember, a person’s “best” may vary from day to day depending on life’s other pressures and involvements.

THE TASKS OF GRIEF

Time **will** help, but time alone will not heal. Grief is work. It requires energy and attention.

The following are the major tasks necessary to complete your healing journey:

FACE THE REALITY OF THE LOSS

First, it is necessary to move through the shock and denial and recognize the reality of your loss. Continuing to deny will not put life back the way it was. It will only serve to prolong your grief process. Relive and remember the details of your loss experience. Most people need to talk about their experience many times to make the loss a reality.

ACKNOWLEDGE AND EXPRESS YOUR EMOTIONS

Second, as you begin to accept the loss of your loved one, strong feelings may surface. You need to acknowledge these emotions and allow yourself to express them. Express your sadness. Give yourself a safe time and place to cry if you need to. Find your own ways to express and let go of anger. Some people hit pillows, some exercise vigorously, others vent to a friend or counselor. Try not to displace your anger onto those around you who haven't earned it. Forgive yourself. Let go of guilt and self reproach. Remember, you did the very best you could at an extremely difficult time. None of us will ever be able to do everything perfectly. Share your fears and anxieties with others – a good friend, counselor, or support group. Believe in yourself. Believe in your own strength.

BE GOOD TO YOURSELF AND REACH OUT FOR THE HELP YOU NEED AT THIS TIME IN ORDER TO DO THE GRIEF WORK NECESSARY FOR A HEALTHY LIFE.

WHAT A SUPPORT GROUP CAN OFFER YOU

It's not easy to understand or accept the loss of a love one. Many emotions surface which take time to sort out, to understand, and finally, to resolve. A caring support system is important during this time. Many people worry whether they are grieving in the "right way", and wonder if their feelings are "normal". A grief support group provides trusted and compassionate people who can be with you to listen to your concerns. It also provides insights about the grief process and what you might expect to experience during your period of adjustment.

By sharing with others, you will learn that you are experiencing natural and normal grief responses. You will receive permission to grieve and validation of your emotions. Support groups bring you together with others who know what you are experiencing because they are going through a similar situation. You are given a safe, confidential place to both accept the support of those around you and to offer it back to others. Being with others helps you gain a sense of perspective about your loss. You begin to realize that many lives are touched with sorrow. This in no way invalidates your pain but may allow you to see it in a different light.

Often friends and relatives think you should be over your grief long before you actually are. You may find that you are hiding it from them and trying to pretend that you are "back to normal". A support group is one place where you may express exactly how you really are feeling. It is a time to focus on your loss and to remember your loved one.

Grief support groups are not depressing. They are designed for you to have an opportunity to share as much or as little as you feel like sharing. The purpose of the professional facilitator is to see that everyone gets time to speak if he or she wants. The facilitator also provides information about the grief process and may offer helpful suggestions for individual situations you may be experiencing.

There are many grief support groups in your community. Your local Crisis Clinic or Hospice Bereavement Coordinator should be able to assist you. You may also call Grief & Loss Center at (206) 362-9094 for groups in Washington State.