

Grieving

THE DEATH OF SOMEONE WE LOVE

Sometimes we have an opportunity to anticipate grief. For example, a parent may have been diagnosed as terminally ill and we begin imagining the nearness of their death. Yet, whether a death was unexpected or anticipated, the grief of losing a loved one can throw us into an upheaval of emotions.

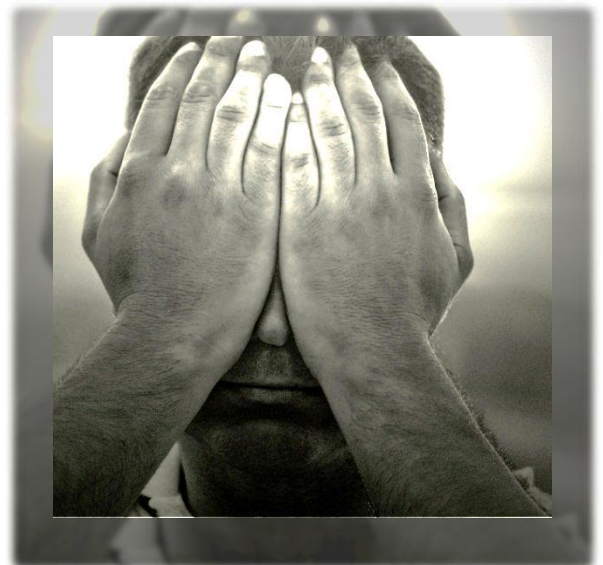
While everyone experiences grief in their own way, the purpose of this newsletter is to provide general information about grief and suggestions on how to allow grief to run its course in a normal and healthy way.

The Grief Reaction

Initially we may feel shock or disbelief that the death occurred. Even after the facts are known we may continue to deny the death. Emotional reactions can then follow in waves. Crying, anger, guilt, depression, yearning and pining, and feelings of emptiness can occur unpredictably and in any order. We can just as likely experience feelings of numbness and detachment. Sometimes we worry about our sanity and secretly or openly wonder, *Am I losing my mind?* Approximately half of those grieving a death experience hallucinations and related feelings of unreality.

This roller coaster of emotions is often part of the normal grief process. Yet many of us believe that stoic, silent, and emotionally controlled behaviour is the normal way grieving is addressed. We sometimes get caught in thinking that we need to resume our routine right away that getting emotional is self-indulgent. On the contrary, the open release of emotions can be a healthy response to loss. A good cry can release the emotional tension and bring a sense of relief and freshness.

The physical signs of grief can include weakness, a loss of appetite, tightness in the throat, and a shortness of breath. These can come and go throughout the day.



How Long Does Grief Go On?

There is no fixed time in which grief becomes resolved. It can take anywhere from three months to five years to move from the initial shock of loss to successful readjustment. Readjustment refers to an acceptance of the death, and the realization that life will never be the same again. It also refers to the discovery that life goes on and that it is possible to get involved or reinvested in activities. A sense of enthusiasm may also return.

At that time, it becomes easier to extend ourselves to others and to accept the attention they offer. Peace of mind is restored, even though sadness may still well up on occasion. Grieving may also lead to spiritual explorations, to a re-examination of values and to a more direct questioning of the meaning of life.

How Do I Know My Reactions Are Normal?

During the normal course of grief, the intensity and frequency of emotions should diminish with time, even though the thoughts and memories may continue to unpredictably occupy our attention. On the other hand, abnormal grief typically involves being stuck - either stuck in one repetitive emotion, stuck in feeling nothing at all (delayed or suppressed grief), stuck in social isolation, or stuck in patterns of distracting or detrimental activities. These create more problems and alienate others. For example, abnormal grief may result in unwise business decisions or hostility. Time on its own does not heal.

What Happens If We Get Stuck?

We may begin to feel that we have become too lonely, too angry or too overwhelmed. We may feel that we are unable to move from the pain and despair to any renewed sense of hope, purpose or wholeness. When this occurs we need to develop a plan that focuses on-

- acknowledging both emotionally and mentally that the death has occurred,
- understanding the nature of our loss and its impact, and
- realizing that grief is normal and we can successfully adapt to life without forgetting our loss.

Our plan can be as simple as a short list of positive statements about ourselves, our loved ones, or life itself. Statements that are reaffirmed several times a day. The plan might also involve talking to a close friend, family member or counsellor, or even participating in a bereavement group.

What Help is Available?

Different types of loss present different challenges. Suicides can leave a different emotional impact on survivors than a death by disease. Those who have faced several losses in a short period of time face more stress. There are many types of support, counselling, and assistance. The help that is available needs to be sensitive to the particular circumstances of the loss.

Once again remember that supportive friends can be very helpful during difficult times and beyond.

**To pursue your own grief work,
call your EFAP to set an appointment for grief counselling.**

**For confidential assistance
Brown Crawshaw 1.800.668.2055
www.browncrawshaw.com**