

The Experience of Grief

Coping With Your Loss



“Why” is a word often repeated when a person is struggling to accept that a loved one has died. Many believe that if an answer can be identified, it will bring some relief. However, there is no logic regarding feelings or desires. We hope the following information, based on material provided by psychotherapist and grief counselor Diana McKendree, M.Ed., will help you find hope and provide you with assistance as you gradually work through your grieving process.

What do grief and bereavement mean?

The grieving process is natural. It is a long-term process – not logical or linear in any way. In order for us to heal, we must give ourselves and others permission to “experience the experience.” If we try to replace our losses without identifying, expressing and honoring our feelings, we may discover anxiety and loneliness. Each person’s pattern is unique, and every phase and stage is a part of each individual’s experience. While many expect the grieving process to be over in a few months, it may last for years. This does not mean a person will be in the pits of despair the entire time, but it does mean he/she may experience waves of emotion on occasion. We never get over our grief, but we do come through it, frequently with a greater appreciation of the now.

Bereavement is the total process that goes on as a result of grieving. It includes the process of healing and recovery as well as the experience of grief.

The Spiral

Perhaps the best way to understand grieving is to imagine standing in the middle of a large spiral, made up of every conceivable experience and emotion. You have no way of knowing what will jump out at you, with what intensity, or in what combination. This can be terrifying!

When someone dies, we grieve the present, the past and what might have been in the future. As you enter the spiral, you may experience a period of disorientation. You may feel numb from your efforts to block reality from your mind. This protects you from the shock. You may withdraw, become more introverted or display erratic behavior, demanding attention from others. It may be best to postpone making major decisions. If this isn’t possible, seek out others who can offer guidance and support.

We begin to experience our deepest pain as we remember – reviewing the good, bad and indifferent. We may feel an overwhelming sense of physical loss and loneliness, often forgetting the deceased’s faults. Feelings of anger, regret and guilt are normal. We often need to forgive ourselves.

If you love deeply, you will grieve deeply. If you deny your grief, you deny the reality of the love you felt. Letting go gradually does not mean forgetting, but rather “re-remembering” yourself, which will enable you to put your energy into living fully once again. The process of re-establishment is slow as we look to the future with caution and renewed hope. Although it may seem impossible at first, we can find fresh reasons for living. However, this does not happen without the work of grief.

Grief Work

In 1944, Erich Lindemann first used the words “grief work” to describe the spiral process of grief. We must work at acknowledging and releasing our feelings as we struggle to make sense of our experience. We are seldom prepared for the intensity of our feelings and responses.

Although you may feel very sensitive and vulnerable, it is important to do your grief work. This allows you to let go of your feelings of anxiety, helplessness, hopelessness and isolation. Gradually, you will move to a place of productivity and balance.

What should I expect to feel?

There is no prescription, no one way to grieve. You must discover what way is yours. That little voice inside will often be your only guide. Listen to it. Discover your need rather than follow what others believe you should do. You may expect to feel every emotion possible as you enter this long-term process of grief and bereavement.

- ***Anger***
Although surprising to some, anger is an appropriate emotion and part of the healing process
- ***Guilt***
We often regret past behaviors/decisions but try to remember that hindsight is 20/20
- ***Relief***
Especially if the person was suffering prior to death, relief is a natural response
- ***Depression and Sadness***
Probably the most common reaction to death. . .try to be kind to yourself during this time
- ***Physical Pain***
Strive to maintain a balance as you deal with physical reactions – visit a physician if needed

Different Types of Loss

There are many types of loss (including sudden death, extended illness, death of a spouse, death of a parent, death of a child and suicide) that will have an impact on how you grieve.

Regardless of the type of loss, however, many people find self-help groups provide much needed support, as well as a safe place to explore your identity and tell your story. Through this sharing with others, you may realize you are not the only one feeling isolated and afraid.

What are the benefits of a funeral?

Funerals are designed to benefit the living, not the dead. They are invaluable in helping people accept the reality of death. The funeral offers the community an opportunity to come together in their grief – to support the immediate family and one another. It allows everyone to outwardly express their feelings in an appropriate setting. As friends share in the loss, it is a reminder that death need not be faced alone.

The funeral service helps us focus on the person who has died, the life they led, and the continuing impact they have on our lives. It is an opportunity to participate in a ritual and a rite of passage, which enables us to begin letting go. Without this, our process of acceptance may be prolonged and difficult. As hard as it may be, seeing the body offers us the opportunity to say good-bye, helping to bring the relationship to a close.

To create a meaningful funeral service that accurately reflects the life of the deceased, it is important to explore the many options available to you with your funeral director. He/she will provide assistance and support in planning a service that will be as unique as the person being remembered.

Beyond today

Time alone will not heal your grief. You must give yourself permission to fully experience it and to accept that death is a part of life.

When grief is expressed, you are able to see the healing process at work. You can transform your grief into personal growth. This requires confronting your feelings honestly, sharing them with people who care, and struggling to make sense of them. As you do this, you will gradually be able to let go of your pain and begin to live life fully. Life is a paradox. It is only through living that we die, and through continually dying that we are able to live full and productive lives.



We hope the information provided has been helpful. We are committed to assisting you with all your cremation and funeral service questions and needs. Please don't hesitate to contact us for a complete brochure or more detailed information on this and other topics.