

We who grieve

What is grief?

Grief is a word used to describe a natural response to a significant loss. Grief is a feeling of deep sorrow, which follows the loss of someone meaningful or something valuable to us in our lives.

When we grieve, we are physically and emotionally distressed to varying degrees, depending on our own association with the deceased. Our reactions may be complex, bewildering and at times misunderstood by others.

Grief is not just a temporary state of mind, but a whole process that may take many years to work through.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve or no timetable to follow, but it may help us to cope with our feelings if we recognise the various stages of grief.



What are the stages of grief?

There are several stages in the grieving process. With some people these are quite obvious, with others they are not. Some people go forward and then backwards as they work through their grief.

Shock

There is an initial stage of shock to the news of the death of a loved one. There is a feeling of numbness and denial that the death is real. At first we find it difficult to face the fact of the death and want to believe it is just a bad dream. This is a way our mind copes with the sudden shock and mental pain of the loss.

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Harrison Funerals publishes a range of brochures about grief. These brochures and other help is available through contacting them on 8447 1255 or 8265 6060, website www.harrisonfunerals.com.au or email info@harrisonfunerals.com.au

Emotional release

This period of denial gives way to an outpouring of sorrow or anger, which can find release through crying. Some men find it difficult to cry. We can fear losing control or our sanity if we cry - we won't - crying is a natural reaction for both men and women. Holding in our emotions can make the recovery process more difficult.

Loneliness

We can often feel a sense of complete separation from the person who is no longer alive. We feel low, alone and don't know what to do, or where to go to find relief. This is normal to feel alone, even if we have family and friends around us.

Physical symptoms of distress

Sometimes we may feel physically ill with headaches, dizziness or an upset stomach. Poor appetite, low energy, chest pains, sleeplessness and nightmares may also occur. These are all natural bodily reactions at a time when our body is put through a distressing period, both physically and emotionally.

Guilt

Many of us blame ourselves for what has happened. "If only I had been there!" "If only I could have stopped him!" "If only I had come home earlier!" The 'if only' thoughts are typical reactions to death and are quite normal.

For many there is a feeling of relief that the deceased's pain and suffering has finally ended. We need to accept this relief without feeling guilty.

Resentment

We gradually turn our feelings away from ourselves. At this stage we can feel resentment and anger towards the person who has died, the medical profession and even God. We even start to bargain with God to bring the person back to life. It helps to have a close friend to listen to our feelings. If friends are not always available then professional help can be sought from sources in the community.

Gradual detachment

There is a strong human need to make things go on as they have always done before. We will make every effort to return to a daily routine despite the ever present pain of remembering our loved one. Often this remembering is triggered by simple things such as seeing a favourite plant or location, having afternoon tea on Sunday or hearing a familiar saying from someone else's lips.

Gradually we will be able to encounter these things and not burst into tears, or get a noticeable tremble of the lip.

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Recovery

We all respond differently and should not feel obliged to grieve for others in an artificial way. We all have our own unique ways of doing things, including coming back to a stage of 'wholeness', although we will never be the same as before. When we reach that stage, we will at first feel a tentative and fragile peace within, but gradually this feeling will become stronger. It is now important to recognise our own capabilities and strengths, as well as having faith in others to help us cope. Now we can finally begin to build a new life.

How can I help myself?

Talk about it

This will help you to accept the truth of what's happened. It allows the facts to 'sink in'. It will also mean that you can get your feelings out. Friends who are good listeners, rather than ones who try to change the subject, are going to be most valuable. Keeping a diary or just writing about what's on your mind is another good way of getting your feelings out. Talk to God, don't be afraid to tell it like it really is. Your faith will not protect you from the hurt of grief but will ultimately provide opportunities to find strength and hope to help you understand it.

Be kind to yourself

Be patient. Some days will be more difficult than others, but it is important to continue believing that you'll recover. Avoid making any major decisions until you fully recover from your loss.

Ask for help

Relatives, friends and carers want to help, but quite often don't know what to do until you make your needs known to them.

Accept help

Accept the help of others when offered. Family, friends and helpers can make difficult moments easier by giving emotional, as well as practical, help.

Listed below are some resources that will further assist you.

Books

Now that the Funeral is Over
by Doris Zagdanski (Hill of Content 1997)

Healing your Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas Compassionate advice and simple activities to help you through your loss
by Alan D Wolfelt PhD (Companion Press 2001)

Coping with Grief by Mal McKissock
(Australian Broadcasting Corporation)

Men and Grief by Carol Stauracher
(New Herbing Publications Inc 1991)

How to Survive the Loss of a Parent. A Guide for Adults
by Lois F Akner (First Quill Edition 1993)

Website

www.grieflink.asn.au

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