



# Understanding Grief

*Sudden and unexpected - unbelievable shock! Whether it was a tragic accident or a sudden heart attack, you feel numb and wonder when this nightmare will be over. Or...it may be the end of a very long, lingering illness. You even anticipated death and now it is reality. Right now, you may be wrestling with several emotions - extreme sadness, loss, loneliness, guilt, anger - and wondering how in the world you can keep going. You find that it is impacting every aspect of your life - emotionally, mentally, physically, behaviorally and spiritually.*

*As you face the reality of your loss, let us share some thoughts that may help you start to put your life back together again, piece by piece.*

# Time

Grief does not "go away" in two weeks or even two months. It is a continuous process which affects the rest of your life. Allow yourself plenty of time and space to grieve. Every individual's timeframe varies, depending on the circumstances surrounding the death and on the personal emotions experienced.

There is no "normal" time span. Grief, *in very general terms*, can be divided into three intervals: Early Grief (lasting from a few hours to a few days); Acute Grief (lasting from a few months to a few years); and Subsiding Grief (lasting indefinitely).

You may hear countless comments and suggestions about how or what you "should" be doing with regard to your grief as well as the many decisions you face. Please remember that **you alone** are the grief expert in this experience and need to do what is best for you.

## Intervals of Grief

Many theorists have defined "stages" of grief. However, this can be misleading because there is not a set order or pattern of what one may experience while grieving. Every person grieves in a different way. Any and all feelings that you may experience are normal, no matter when, or for how long you endure them.

Early Grief is what occurs when you initially find out about the death. The reality of what has happened is not yet registered. You may experience shock and numbing, denial, or anger.

Acute Grief is the most difficult of the intervals. A variety of responses may surface during this trying time. The reality of the loss is understood, but often accompanied by pangs of intense yearning, spasms of distress, tearful and/or uncontrolled sobbing, restlessness, insomnia, preoccupation with thoughts of the loved one, a constant sense of the presence of the loved one. You may experience a decrease in your ability or desire

to function day to day as before. At the depth of grief, you may experience depression. Try to muster as much patience and grace as you can during this time.

Subsiding Grief is what comes after these first two phases and is the acknowledgement that this is your new reality without your person and that you must continue to live your life without them physically present. You begin to: create new life patterns in the absence of the loved one; find reasons to go on living by reinvesting your interest and energy in new things; and adjust to a new style of life. *Those who avoid their grief may never reach this significant interval.*

Subsiding Grief is not without its hills and valleys, however. Especially when "special days" come up during the year - birthdays, the anniversary of the death, holidays, etc. - the Acute Grief pain is easily reawakened. In fact, you may feel as if you have "backtracked" in your grief journey.

Remember that this grief is proportionate to the love you share with your person. With great love comes great grief. Your love is still here. It's about figuring out what to do with that love. Be patient with yourself - give yourself permission to grieve as you need to. You cannot avoid this grief, and attempts to avoid it will only impede accessing the feelings of love, joy and memories because it is now inextricably linked to the grief that is left behind. Facing and coping with grief is truly an act of love for your person.

# Tears

Crying as a grief reaction is common. Some grieverers cry easily and often, while others may find it hard to cry and feel guilty about that. There is nothing wrong with your tears and there is nothing wrong if your body doesn't react with tears. If you have the urge and need to cry, allow yourself this release. This is especially important for men to remember.

Tears are as natural as laughter and just as healing. Tears, whether shared with others or shed in private, can help release sadness, anger, guilt, exhaustion and loneliness. And tears release stress hormones, which are so important to release when you can from your body. It takes a great deal more energy to keep your feelings inside than to let them out and cause further issues when you don't allow yourself a safe release.

*"I still feel winded. I've learned to breathe despite it. I am starting to think this is the brilliance of human nature. To find new ways to breathe when the old ways are taken from us.*

*To live in spite of the wounds."*

*-s.c lourie*

# Share Your Story

Be open, talk and share about your feelings. Your question may be, "But who can I talk to?" Counselors can be very helpful for some, others prefer grief support groups. Perhaps talking with your pastor may be more comfortable for you. It's all about finding those who understand and won't minimize what you are going through.

Friends and family members are people with whom you can share as well. It is important to keep in mind, though, that they may be experiencing their own grief. Also, please remember that seeking help from a professional is NOT a sign of weakness. On the contrary, it is brave and vitally important that you are taking care of yourself and acknowledging your grief.

# You are a Survivor

You may feel that you will never survive your inner pain. You WILL survive, although there may be times that you won't care whether you go on or not. No matter how badly your heart yearns for it, nothing you can do can bring your loved one back. That is the cruel reality of having to live through the death of your loved one. But you must keep going - your family and friends need you and there may be others you have not even met yet whose life will benefit from you being in their life. There will come a day where you will breath a little easier through the pain and able to cope with your grief in a different way. Hang on and breath deeply until then.

*It is kind of shocking when your world falls to pieces and everything and everyone around you carries on with life. How can the birds continue to sing? How can people carry on loving life? It is like you have become frozen in time and are now watching life like a movie. As the weeks and months roll by, life becomes more real again, but you will never forget that point in time where life stood still.*

*-Zoe Clark-Coates*

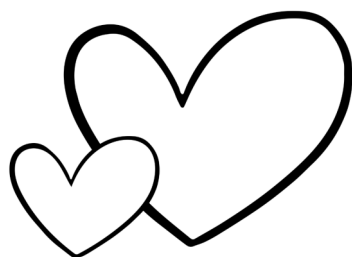
## *A little bit about the kids...*

It is very important that children be involved with the family grieving. They should not and cannot be "spared" from knowledge about the death. When we try to "protect" them from the truth by not allowing their involvement, we only intensify their feelings of loneliness, guilt and fears about the future. It is also vital that children see the adults in their life grieve. This gives the child "permission" to grieve as well. *No child is too young to grieve.* All children are affected in some way by the death of a loved one and grieve in their own way.

Children often know when they are not being told the whole truth, or when their questions are being avoided. Loss of TRUST will compound grief. Try your best to answer ALL of the child's questions as directly and as honestly as you can, even if the answer is "I don't know." This expresses your respect toward the child and the feelings he or she is experiencing. Keep in mind that sometimes the answers they will come up with on their own are much more frightening than the actual truth!

Other losses often accompany the death. A change in residence, caretaker, school or peer group, adds to the loss. Maintain a daily routine as much as possible. Continuity provides children with a sense of security and stability.

Continue to be available long after you think they "should be over it". Children and young people will continue to grieve as they continue to grow and understand the death in new ways. They will also over time discover that love never dies and will always be with them.



*However long it takes, your heart and your mind will carve out a new life amid this weirdly devastated landscape. Little by little, pain and love will find ways to coexist.*

*-Megan Devine, Refuge in Grief*

For more information and grief resources for all ages...

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