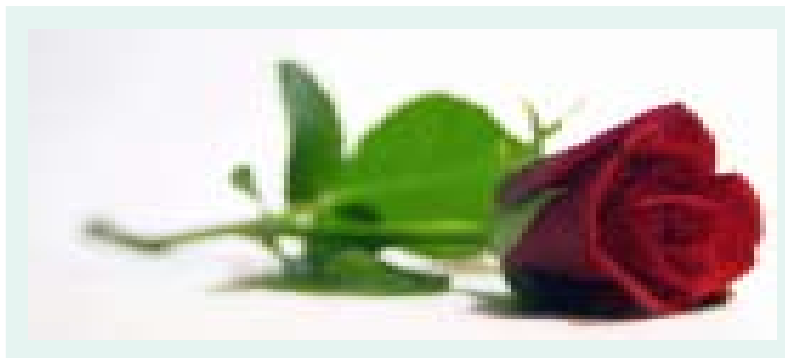


Guide to  
Grief  
&  
Bereavement

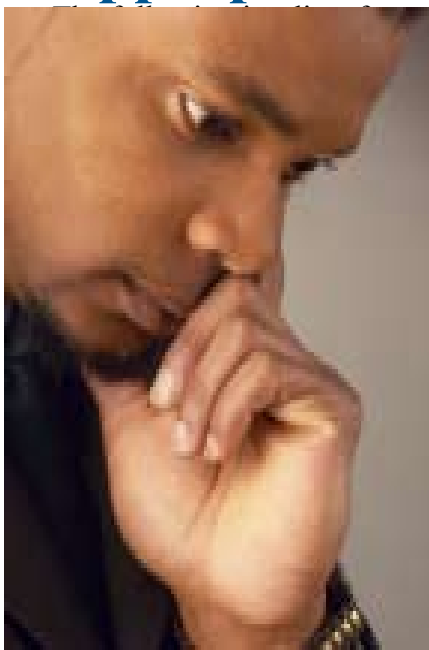


Loss through death can be one of life's most difficult emotional challenges. Feelings may range from extreme loneliness and lack of energy to anxious activity, confusion and various physical symptoms. Few of us know what to expect and what to do.

The grieving process may include some or all of the following:

- **Shock and denial.** Because of our own natural defense mechanisms, the announcement that a death has occurred is often shocking. It may take time for the reality of the tragedy to become clear. A sense of the unreality of death may recur throughout the grief process.
- **Panic.** When we lose a significant relationship, our emotional stability is disrupted and we may feel out of control. Preoccupation with the loss may cause us to question what our next actions will be and to feel panicky.
- **Guilt.** It is natural for us to have wanted everything done to save the person who has died. As we realize the perception of "what else might have been done," we may feel guilty.
- **Anger.** A need to find someone to blame for the loss is common. A feeling of hostility toward physicians, nurses, family members and God may develop.
- **Loneliness.** Bereavement can result in a feeling of emptiness and aloneness. When family and friends leave after the funeral, an even greater isolation may be experienced.
- **Sleep, appetite and physical changes.** Any combination of increased or decreased sleeping and eating may occur. A feeling of being tired, weak or hollow may also be experienced. Resistance to illness is low, making diet, rest, activity and expression very important.
- **Readjustment.** Eventually, the loss diminishes and reinvestment in life occurs. Allowing time to feel all normal feelings of grief and to express that grief helps the bereaved person become ready to live a new life and make plans for the future.

## Appropriate Expectations during Grieving



Appropriate expectations that you can have in grief, depending on the intensity of the loss. Evaluate yourself on each one and see if you are maintaining realistic expectations for yourself.

### You can expect that your grief will probably:

- Take much longer than most people think it will/should.
- Take more energy than you ever would have imagined.
- Involve many changes and be continually developing.
- Show itself in all spheres of your life: psychological, social, and physical.
- Entail mourning not only for the actual person you have lost but also for all the hopes, dreams, and unfulfilled expectations you held for that person, and for the needs that will go unmet because of the death.

- Involve a wide variety of feelings and reactions, not solely those that are generally thought of as grief, such as depression and sadness. You may have some identity confusion as a result of this major loss and of the reactions you are experiencing that may be quite different for you.



**You may:**

- Grieve for many things both symbolic and tangible, not just the death alone.
- Have a combination of anger and depression, such as irritability, frustration, annoyance, or intolerance.
- Feel some anger and guilt, or at least some manifestation of these emotions.
- Lack self esteem.
- Experience grief spasms: acute upsurges of grief that occur suddenly with no warning.
- Have trouble thinking and making decisions.
- Feel as if you are going crazy.
- Find yourself having a number of physical reactions.
- Find that there are certain dates, events, stimuli or even experiences that bring upsurges of grief.
- Begin a search for meaning and question your religion and/or philosophy of life.

**Society may:**

- Have unrealistic expectations about your mourning and may respond inappropriately to you.

## Is There a Right Way to Grieve?

This is a normal question. Each person has his or her own way and pace, but there are common reactions people seem to have. The following are natural responses to grieving loss.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Am I doing this right? How should I feel?</li> <li>• I seem to have no control.</li> <li>• I'm so relieved it's over.</li> <li>• I hurt so much I ache.</li> <li>• It's as if I'm on the outside looking on as the world goes by.</li> <li>• I can't concentrate and I'm absent-minded.</li> <li>• This can't be real.</li> <li>• My throat feels tight.</li> <li>• My chest feels heavy.</li> <li>• What do I have to live for?</li> <li>• Sometimes I get so angry.</li> <li>• I cry at unexpected times.</li> <li>• I don't want to be around others.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I don't want people seeing me when I'm sad.</li> <li>• What am I going to do?</li> <li>• I'm not hungry anymore.</li> <li>• I seem to be eating all of the time.</li> <li>• I sometimes feel or hear the presence of him/her.</li> <li>• I feel so empty.</li> <li>• I don't like making decisions alone.</li> <li>• I feel numb.</li> <li>• I miss being touched.</li> <li>• I'm so lonely.</li> </ul> |
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## Steps to Survival

1. **Recognize the loss.** For awhile, you are numb. It has happened - try not to avoid it.
2. **Be with the pain.** You're hurting. Admit it. To feel pain after loss is normal; proof that you are alive; proof that you are able to respond.
3. **You are not alone.** Loss is part of life. Everyone experiences it.
4. **You're a beautiful, worthwhile person.** You are much more than the emotional wound you are presently feeling.
5. **You will survive.** Believe that you will heal.
6. **Give yourself time to heal.** The greater the loss, the more time it will take.
7. **Healing has progressions and regressions.** Healing and growth are not a smooth upward progression, but full of ups and downs - dramatic leaps and depressing backslides.
8. **Tomorrow will come.** Your life has been full of positive experiences. They will return.
9. **Take good care of yourself.** Get plenty of rest. Stick to a schedule. Plan your days. Activity will give you a sense of order.
10. **Keep decision-making to a minimum.** Expect your judgment to be clouded for awhile. You are going through change; don't add additional ones.
11. **Seek comfort from others.** It's human and courageous.
12. **Surround yourself with living things.** A new plant, a pet, a bowl of fresh fruit.
13. **Reaffirm your beliefs.** Use your faith right now. Explore it, lean on it, grow.
14. **Recognize that weekends and holidays are the worst.** Schedule activities you particularly enjoy.
15. **Suicidal thoughts: these may arise - they are a symptom of pain.** If you feel that they are getting out of control, seek professional help.
16. **Do your mourning now.** Allow yourself to be with your pain. It will pass sooner. Postponed grief can return to hound you. Grief feelings will be expressed one way or another.
17. **Be gentle with yourself.** You have suffered a disabling emotional wound. Treat yourself with care.
18. **Let yourself heal completely.** Give yourself time. You are a convalescent right now. Don't jump into new things too quickly.
19. **If mementos are helpful to you, use them.** If they bind you to a dead past, however, get rid of them. Before you say "hello," you must say "goodbye."
20. **Anticipate a positive outcome.** Pain is acceptable - it tells us we are hurting. But it is not a



welcome long-term visitor.

**21. It is OK to feel depressed.** Crying is cleansing - a wonderful release. Be with these feelings for awhile.

**22. It's OK to feel anger.** Everyone acts angry at the loss of love. Channel it wisely, and it will go away as you heal. Hit a pillow. Kick a bed. Yell and scream when you're alone. Run. Play hard games. Hit a punching bag. Play the piano.

**23. Good eating habits help the healing process.** Make sure you are nutritionally

nourished.

24. **You're vulnerable.** Your resistance will be low. Invite help only from those who are trustworthy.
25. **Beware of the rebound.** There's a hole in your life. Be careful about rushing to fill it.
26. **Beware of addictive activities.** Alcohol, drugs, food, and diversions can all momentarily help us escape from pain. These never help us to heal.
27. **Set a time limit on mourning.** Remaining distraught for a long time is no proof that you're really loved. Real love is self-supporting.
28. **Keep a journal.** Putting your thoughts and feelings on paper is a good way to get them out. You can also refer back and see just how far you have come.
29. **Heal at your own pace.** Never compare yourself to another grieving person. Each of us has our own time clock.
30. **You will grow.** As you work through your sadness, you will grow. You may begin to understand that change and separation are a natural part of living. You are a better person for having loved.
31. **Begin to look to the future.** Begin to experiment with new lifestyles - new ways of filling the day. They might even turn out to be fun.
32. **Give yourself praise.** You are a richer, deeper, wiser person for having survived your grief.
33. **Be open.** Give yourself opportunities to meet new people, places, ideas, and experiences, but don't forget to build on the past. Don't throw out what has been worthwhile to you. Small changes are the best at first.
34. **Begin to give of yourself.** Giving can bring you the greatest joy. It is healing.
35. **Expect relapses.** There will always be certain things that trigger sadness again. This is normal.
36. **Alone does not mean lonely.** Solitude can be creative, restful, and even fun. You can learn to enjoy it.
37. **Enjoy your freedom.** You are now in control. Make the most of your choices. You can even learn to take risks.
38. **Celebrate your survival!**

