

## Understanding Grief

Grief, with its many ups and downs, lasts far longer than society in general recognizes. **Be patient with yourself.**

Each person's **grief is individual.** You and your family will experience it and cope with it differently.

**Crying** is an acceptable and healthy expression of grief and releases built-up tension for the bereaved person. Cry freely as you feel the need.

**Physical reactions** to the death of a loved one may include loss of appetite or over-eating, sleeplessness, and sexual difficulties. The bereaved may find that s/he has very little energy and cannot concentrate. A balanced diet, rest, and moderate exercise are especially important for you at this time.

**Avoid the use of drugs and alcohol.** Medication should be taken sparingly and only under the supervision of your physician. Many substances are addictive and can lead to a chemical dependence. In addition, they may stop or delay the necessary grieving process.

**Friends and relatives** may be uncomfortable around you. They want to ease your pain, but do not know how. Take the initiative and help them learn how to be supportive to you. Talk about your loved one so they know this is appropriate.

Whenever possible, **put off major decisions** (changing job, residence, etc.) for at least a year. This allows for more rational and less emotional decision making.

The bereaved may feel s/he has nothing to live for and may think about a **release from this intense pain.** Be assured that many bereaved persons feel this way, but that a sense of purpose and meaning does return. **The pain does lessen.**

**Guilt**, real or imagined, is a normal part of grief. It surfaces in thought and feelings of "if only". In order to resolve this guilt, learn to express and share these feelings, and learn to forgive yourself.

**Anger is another** common reaction to loss. Anger, like guilt, needs expression and sharing in a healthy and acceptable manner.

**Children** are often the forgotten grievers within a family. They are experiencing many of the same emotions you are, so share thoughts and tears with them. Though it is a painful time, be sure they feel loved and included.

**Holidays and anniversaries** of your loved one's birth and death can be a stressful time. Consider the feelings of the entire family in planning how to spend the day. Allow time and space for your own emotional needs.

A loved one's death often causes the bereaved to challenge and examine his **faith and philosophy** of life. Don't be disturbed if you are questioning old beliefs. Talk about it. For many, faith offers help to accept the unacceptable.

It helps to become **involved** with a group of persons having similar experiences; **sharing** eases loneliness and promotes the **expression** of your grief in an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding.