

## What We Need During Grief

**TIME:** Time alone; and time with others whom you trust and who will listen when you need to talk. Months and sometimes years of time to feel and understand the feelings that go along with loss.

**CARING:** Try to allow yourself to accept the expressions of caring from others even though they may be uneasy and awkward. Helping a friend or relative also suffering the same loss may bring a feeling of closeness with that person.

**SECURITY:** Try to reduce or find help for financial or other stresses in your life. Allow yourself to be close to those you trust. Getting back into a routine helps. Do things at your own pace.

**PERMISSION TO BACK-SLIDE:** Sometimes after a period of feeling good, we find ourselves back in the old feelings of extreme sadness, despair, or anger. This is the nature of grief, up and down, and it may happen over and over for a time. It happens because, as humans, we cannot take in all of the pain and the meaning of death at once. So we let it in a little at a time.

**REST, RELAXATION, EXERCISE, NOURISHMENT, DIVERSION:** You may need extra amounts of things you needed before. Hot baths, afternoon naps, a trip, a project or "cause" to work for to help others—any of these may give you a lift. Grief is an emotionally and physically exhausting process. You need to replenish yourself. Follow what feels healing to you and what connects you to the people you love.

**HOPE:** You may find hope and comfort from those who have experienced a similar loss. Knowing what helped them and realizing that they have recovered and that time does help, may give you hope that sometime in the future your grief will be less raw and painful.

**SMALL PLEASURES:** Do not underestimate the healing effects of small pleasures. Sunsets, a walk in the woods, a favorite food – all are small steps toward regaining your pleasure in life itself.

**GOALS:** For awhile it will seem that much of life is without meaning. At times like these, small goals are helpful. Something to look forward to, like playing tennis with a friend next week, a movie tomorrow night, a trip next month helps you get through the time in the immediate future. Living one day at a time is a rule of thumb. At first, don't be surprised if your enjoyment of these things isn't the same – this is normal. As time passes, you may want to work on longer range goals to give some structure and direction to your life; guidance or counseling can be helpful.

## What to Say and What Not to Say...

### What to say to comfort someone in their grief:

- I'm sorry.
- I'm sad for you.
- How are you doing with this?
- I don't know why it happened.
- What can I do for you?
- I'm here and I want to listen.
- Please tell me what you are feeling.
- This must be hard for you.
- What's the hardest part for you?
- I'll call you tomorrow.
- You must really be hurting.
- It isn't fair, is it?
- You must really feel angry.
- Take all the time you need.
- Thank you for sharing your feelings.

### What NOT to say when comforting someone in their grief:

- I understand how you feel.
- Death was a blessing.
- It was God's will.
- It all happened for the best.
- You're still young.
- You have your whole life ahead of you.
- You'll feel worse before you feel better.
- You can always remarry.
- Call me when I can help.
- Something good will come out of this.
- At least you have another child.
- He/she led a full life.
- It's time to put it behind you now.
- Be strong!
- You can have other children.

## **Frequently Asked Questions:**

### **Grief and Bereavement**

- 1. How long does the mourning process last?**
  - a. There is neither a “correct” way to mourn nor a “correct” amount of time to mourn. Grief is individual and people’s needs for support, encouragement and help are dependent upon many factors including their relationship with the deceased, their coping mechanisms, their social resources in terms of family and friends.
  
- 2. What is the best thing to say to a friend whose family member just died?**
  - a. Just remember the grieving person is not looking to you to solve their problems or intellectualize about what has happened. The person needs someone to listen; someone who is comfortable with their tears; someone who can help handle some of the task oriented activities for them such as making phone calls. Just tell them you will be there if they want to talk, but they don’t have to. If they are comfortable with hugs, hug them. Say “I’m so sorry you are going through this. Just know I care and I’m here.”
  
- 3. How do I know if my friend is experiencing a normal level of grief or if she needs help dealing with a deeper depression?**
  - a. If your friend is preoccupied with blaming herself for the death and can’t get beyond feeling guilty about everything; if she is feeling hopeless and helpless and cannot find joy in anything, she should be seen by a professional for an evaluation of these symptoms.
  - b. Offer to go with her to ensure she gets to the appointment.
  
- 4. Am I a bad person to feel a sense of relief that my husband died and no longer has to deal with the painful cancer that slowly killed him?**
  - a. It is perfectly normal to sometimes feel relief mixed in with the grief and sadness at a loved ones death. Being able to let someone go when they are in such distress is a sign of love and not something to feel guilty about.