

Inside is a collection of the most requested bereavement and grief handouts.

For more information, please call 973-948-2283, visit karenannquinlanhospice.org/bereavement, facebook facebook.com/karenannquinlanhospice

### **Responses to Normal Grief**

**PHYSICAL:** Loss of appetite, increase of appetite, difficulty falling/staying asleep, increased need for sleep, stomach upset or pain, nausea, diarrhea, headaches, frequent colds or other physical illnesses, heaviness of body, tightness in chest area, sensitive skin, empty feeling in body, tightness in throat, hot or cold flashes, pounding heart, dry mouth, fatigue, startles easily, oversensitive to noise, dizziness, muscular aches/weakness, menstrual irregularities, sexual impotence, breathless



**MENTAL/COGNITIVE:** Difficulty making decisions, lack of interest in typical activities, preoccupied with the loss, shorter attention span, lack of focus, memory loss, difficulty concentrating, easily and often distracted, self-destructive thoughts, disbelief, confusion, sense of pressure, finality (things will never be the same), dread (fear of own or other's death), the "if only's" and the "what if's"

**BEHAVIORAL:** Interpersonal changes, avoid reminders, poor grades, disorganized, dreams of deceased, nightmares, behaviorally imitates the deceased, appearance of traits of the deceased, excessive hugging, avoiding physical touch, bedwetting, extreme quietness, isolating, fighting, verbal attacks, sighing, listlessness, clinging, social withdrawal, marked change in typical behaviors, searching for loved one in a crowd, over activity, underactivity, lack of motivation, attachment to linking objects

**EMOTIONAL:** Irritable, intolerant, guilty, mood swings, suicidal thoughts (not plan or intent), wanting to be with loved one who died, panic/anxiety attacks, withdrawal from friends and family, cries easily, can't cry, anger, sadness, yearning, blaming, numbness, helplessness, depression, hysteria, relief, fear, loneliness, rage, intense feelings, feeling unreal, self-reproach, apathy, shock, feel that life has no meaning

**SPIRITUAL:** Anger at God, indifference to God, confusion regarding God, feeling abandoned by God, denial of a God, stronger need for religious rituals, decrease in need for religious rituals, increased need for prayer, decreased need for prayer, preoccupation with the afterlife, preoccupation with the meaning of life, paranormal experiences (sense of presence, olfactory, dreams, visual, auditory, tactile)

Please note this is not a comprehensive list of responses to grief.

### **Appropriate Expectations You Can Have For Yourself In Grief**

Your grief will take longer than most people think.

Your grief will take more energy than you would have ever imagined.

Your grief will involve many changes and be continually developing.

Your grief will show itself in all spheres of your life.

Your grief will depend on how you perceive the loss.

You will grieve for all the things the death represented, both symbolic and tangible.

Your grief will involve a wide variety of feelings and reactions.

The loss will resurrect old issues, feelings and unresolved conflicts from the past.

You may experience some identity confusion.

You may experience a combination of anger and depression.

You may have a lack of self-concern.

You may experience grief bursts (bursts of grief that may occur with no warning).

You may have trouble thinking and making decisions.

You may feel like you are going crazy.

## Variables To Your

By Jeanne M. Harper, M.P.S.

Your grieving process is unique because it is YOURS. There are many reasons, many variables, for the differences in your grief. The reasons for the differences may include:

#### Social, Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, Spiritual and Financial

Some of the variables may include:

**Age** – Age makes a difference in our ability to understand death, dying, the future, problems, opportunities, our ability to get around (i.e., going to stores, meetings, church, etc.).

**Gender** – Men may grieve quite differently than women due to stereotypical roles/rules or perceived social expectations, such as "Men don't cry"; "Men don't know how to shop for food, do laundry, housework"; "Women don't know how to pay the bills, do taxes, fix the car."

**Life Experiences** – How have you dealt with other losses/deaths in your life? When did these losses/deaths occur? Is this your first experience with the death of a loved one? If you've experienced grief before, you know what the "normal" experience for you is, such as concentration and/or memory problems (short-or long-term). When the right side of the brain is overloaded with feelings and emotions, the left side, which is the cognitive/thinking side, has a difficult time functioning. So, you may leave the stove on; lose your keys or other important items. Grief support groups can help you learn what is "normal" in grief.

**Individual personality, coping skills, adjustment** – Are you the type that holds your feelings and concerns inside? Or, do you talk or scream them out for others to hear? Or, perhaps you are the type who "works" your feelings and stays busy to keep from feeling. Are you the type who will ask for help, ask questions, and is willing to learn? Or, are you the type who will work it out in your own way?

**Family communications, myths and attitudes about loss/death** – Is it OK in your family to talk about death and issues surrounding death and dying?

**Cultural background and current environment** – Whatever your family's cultural background, Italian, German, Jewish, etc., there are many different rituals and expectations about how you are "expected" to grieve, based on stereotypes and family expectations. As a child, you learned the grieving style of significant adults and as an adult, this will make a difference as to how you allow or expect yourself to grieve now.

# **Grieving Process**

**Health** – Are you in good physical health or do you have chronic pain or illness? This can deplete your emotional energy as well as make your grieving process more difficult. Since the death happened, do you find you are having aches and pains? This is very common. Make an appointment for a complete physical to relieve yourself of negative thoughts and fears.

**Support system –** Do you have good friends and family who will allow you to grieve YOUR way, who support you with love, caring and space? Does your church support your grief? Does your community have a support group for those who are bereaved?

**Financial resources** – Were there a lot of medical bills to be sent to Medicare, Medicaid, insurance companies? Will your portion of the bills overwhelm you? Was there a will? Were there insurance monies to help with the bills? Do you have a good accountant and/or lawyer to assist you through the tax and legal issues? Will you have income? Will you have to go to work? Do you know what is available in your community?

**Relationship with the deceased** – Are there secondary losses due to the death? For example, a widow/ widower not only losses a mate, but also a partner in raising children, or losses a home due to financial constraints. What kind of relationship did you have with the deceased? What was your last experience with the deceased like? How did the person who died influence your life? How much of your day was involved in caring or being with them? How much did this person do for you?

**Preparedness for the death** – Did you have time to say goodbye and things, such as "I love you" or "Please forgive me"? If you didn't have time, take the time now and write them a "goodbye letter" and send it symbolically to the deceased, as one child did by digging a hole beside the grave and burying the letter, or attach it to a helium balloon and let it float into the sky.

**Nature of the death** – Where did the death take place? Was it sudden or expected? If it was expected, did the time before death last a few hours, days or weeks? Were you provided with information from medical professionals to help you understand what was happening? Was the death a suicide, leaving lots of questions, fears, guilt, anger, etc.? Was the death a homicide or perhaps due to a car accident, or a drunk driver? If so, was there a lot of anger and unanswered questions?

These are just a few of the variables and the issues that surround them that can create differences in YOUR grieving process.

### Anger, Guilt, and Grief

**ANGER IS NORMAL:** It is a protest. It is a reaction against losing control of our lives. Accept your anger as being normal.

#### ANGER IN THE EXTREMES:

Denial of anger will result in physical problems.

- Continuous striking out will result in the alienation of family and friends which will undermine needed support systems.
- Getting stuck in anger will result in self-defeat. Grief will not be worked through. Control and productivity will be lost. Anger becomes the controlling agent.

**HEALTHY ANGER:** It is necessary to recognize and accept anger as part of the grief process.

Vent it constructively.

#### **EXPRESSING ANGER:**

Write about it in a journal (to keep or throw away).

Talk about it with those you trust and can understand.

Talk to an empty chair in the privacy of your own home or room. Anyone you want can be in that chair.

Switch chairs. What would the person in the other chair say to you?

Act out your anger with inanimate objects (punching bag, pillow, hammering.) Physical exercise.

**ANGER AND FEAR:** There is a relationship between anger and fear in body chemistry. Releasing anger may help reduce fears.

**ANGER AND GUILT ARE INTERTWINED:** We are taught we should not be angry, especially at God, family, friends, loved ones or the person who has died. Hence, guilt.

**IMAGINED GUILT:** Guilt during grief is often referred to as the "if onlys." In dealing with the "if onlys", remember ....



Some people think that to be strong is never to feel pain.



In reality, the strongest people are the ones who feel it, understand it, and accept it.

~positiveoutlooksblog.com



## The Grieving Person's Bill of Rights

Though you should reach out to others as you do the work of mourning, you should not feel obligated to accept the unhelpful responses you may receive from some people. You are the one who is grieving, and as such, you have certain "rights" no one should try to take away from you.

The following list is intended both to empower you and to heal and to decide how others can and cannot help. This is not to discourage you from reaching out to others for help, but rather to assist you in distinguishing useful responses from hurtful ones.

#### You have the right to experience your own unique grief.

No one else will grieve in exactly the same way you do. So, when you turn to others for help, don't allow them to tell you what you should or should not be feeling.

#### You have the right to talk about your grief.

Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk as much as you want, as often as you want, about your grief.

#### You have the right to feel a multitude of emotions.

Confusion, disorientation, fear, guilt and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey. Others may try to tell you that feeling angry, for example, is wrong. Don't take these judgmental responses to heart. Instead, find listeners who will accept your feelings without conditions.

#### You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits.

Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel ready to do.

#### You have the right to experience grief "attacks".

Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but it is normal and natural. Find someone who understands and will let you talk it out.

#### You have the right to make use of ritual.

The funeral ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. More importantly, the funeral is a way for you to mourn. If others tell you that rituals such as these are silly or unnecessary, don't listen.

#### You have the right to embrace your spirituality.

If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you feel angry at God, find someone to talk with who won't be critical of your feelings of hurt and abandonment.

#### You have the right to search for meaning.

You may find yourself asking, "Why did he or she die? Why this way? Why now?" Some of your questions may have answers, but some may not. And watch out for the clichéd responses some people may give you. Comments like, "It was God's will" or "Think of what you have to be thankful for" are not helpful and you do not have to accept them.

#### You have a right to treasure your memories.

Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. You will always remember. Instead of ignoring your memories, find others with whom you can share them.

#### You have the right to move toward your grief and heal.

Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly. Remember, grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you must forget that the death of someone loved changes your life forever.

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### 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.

**BE AWARE OF DRUG and ALCOHOL USE:** The use of drugs, alcohol, an even prescription medications may prolong and delay the necessary process of grieving. We cannot prevent or cure grief. The only way out is through the grief process.

**PERMISSION TO CHANGE YOUR MIND:** Grieving can shake you up inside. You may find yourself having trouble concentrating, constantly reevaluating your priorities, or never being quite sure what you want. Let people know in advance that you may decide to change your plans.

"What We Need During Grief" was adapted from Self Help Correspondence for the Bereaved: A Manual for Hospice Programs, Judith Herr, MS, Hilltop Hospice, Grand Junction, CO.

### **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.

### AFTER MY LOSS

I need to talk about my loss. I may often need to tell you what happened – or ask you why it happened. Each time I discuss my loss I am helping myself face the reality of the death of my loved one.

I need to know that you care about me. I need to feel your touch, your hugs. I need you just to be with me. (and I need to be with you.)

I need for you to believe in me and in my ability to get through this grief in my own way. (and in my own time.)

Please don't judge me now – or think that I'm behaving strangely.
Remember I'm grieving. I may even be in shock.
I may feel afraid. I may feel deep rage.
I may even feel guilty. But above all, I hurt.
I am experiencing a pain unlike any I've ever felt before.

Don't be concerned if you think I'm getting better and then suddenly I seem to slip backward. Grief makes me behave this way at times. And please don't tell me you "know just how I feel", or that it's time for me to get on with my life. (I am probably already saying this to myself.) What I need now is time to grieve and recover.

Most of all, thank you for being my friend.

Thank you for your patience. Thank you for your caring. Thank you for your helping, for understanding. Thank you for praying for me.

And remember, in the days or years ahead,

After your loss – when you need me As I have needed you – I will understand. And then I will come and be with you





#### Barbara LesStrang-<u>Afterloss</u>, A recovery companion for those who are grieving.