



Upper Island Assessment and Resource Service

EXPECTATIONS OF GRIEF

Grief is a process and it is work. These two points are important in the way one thinks about grief. Seeing the **process** gives an overall picture of what happens for people who are grieving, allows us to create a model of the movement and changes. Using a model of phases rather than stages, acknowledges that this is not a mechanical step-by-step process but an organic process. One phase blends into another where there is flow backwards and forwards within the overall progress.

Knowing grief is **work** can be empowering for people. By acknowledging what it is that they are doing, we can foster a sense of accomplishment and success in a difficult time. There can be a sense of control as tasks are tackled and choices made about the work to be done.

The following chart, *Checklist: Healthy Responses to Grief*, outlines three phases in grief and identifies the tasks associated with each phase. People will easily identify with the responses outlined for the phases. Stressing that these are healthy and normal responses may help people to see their grief work as constructive personal growth rather than harmful self-indulgence.

The predictability of progressing to another phase gives people permission and hope for improvement in the future.

CHECKLIST: HEALTHY RESPONSES TO GRIEF

When a Death Occurs	Confronting the Pain	Re-establishing Connections
<p>After the death you will have feelings about what has happened. You may be overwhelmed, panicked and experience strong physical reactions.</p> <p>Your grief task here is to move from denial to acceptance that the death really has occurred.</p>	<p>Later, when the numbness wears off, you will begin to feel the emotional pain of grieving. The intensity of this pain may surprise and frighten you but it is healthy and will gradually lessen as you live with it.</p> <p>Your grief task is to acknowledge, experience and work through your feelings of hopelessness, yearning and despair.</p>	<p>Finally your grief will become less acute and you will once again have the energy and desire to reconnect with the world.</p> <p>Your grief task is to adjust to a life without the deceased: to reinvest your energy in new activities and relationships.</p>
<p>Feelings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbness, empty • Indifferent to daily activities • Withdrawn or explosive • Needing to review death 	<p>Feelings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings are acute, conflicting, extreme • Anger, sadness, guilt • Feeling lost, overwhelmed • Generalized anxiety, depression • Unrealistic fears about others or self 	<p>Feelings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotions settle down, less extreme • Feeling of coming out of the fog • More peace and happiness • Some guilt about how life goes on
<p>Thoughts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion, sense of unreality • Poor concentration, forgetfulness • Denial, disbelief • Daydreaming • Constant thoughts about person 	<p>Thoughts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forgetfulness, daydreaming, confusion • Denial of meaning of death • Denial of irreversibility of death • Inability to concentrate or comprehend • Sense of going crazy, losing touch with reality 	<p>Thoughts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness and acceptance of death • Fewer thoughts of being crazy • Increased perspective about the death • Ability to remember with less pain • Improved concentration
<p>Body</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tight chest, palpitations • Shortness of breath • Diarrhea, constipation, vomiting • Crying, sighing • Lack of energy, weakness, rigidity 	<p>Body</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tight chest, shortness of breath • Diarrhea, constipation • Restlessness, aimless activity • Gut-wrenching gnawing emptiness • Sharp pangs that cut into heart 	<p>Body</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer sleepless nights • Dreams and hallucinations decrease • Physical symptoms subside • Appetite returns to normal • Gut-wrenching emptiness is gone

<i>Body continued</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dizziness, shivering, faintness • Restlessness • Loss of appetite • Insomnia or sleeping too much 	<i>Body continued</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nightmares, vivid dreams, hallucination • Change in appetite • Change in sleep patterns • Experiencing symptom of dead person 	
Social <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance from or dependence on others • Lack of interest in other's activities • Unrealistic expectations • Poor judgement about relationships 	Social <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued distance, lack of interest • Needing company but unable to ask • Looking for replacement relationships • Self-consciousness 	Social <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest in other's daily affairs • Ability to reach out • Energy for new relationships • Desire for independence resurfaces
Spiritual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blaming God or life • Lack of meaning or direction • Wanting to die/to join the dead person 	Spiritual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued blaming • Lack of meaning • Trying to contact the dead person 	Spiritual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconnection with religious beliefs • New direction, life has meaning • Accepting death as part of life
What Helps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To talk about the person and the death frequently • To know others experience the same reactions to death • To feel there are practical and emotional supports available 	What Helps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To realize what this death means to you, now and in the future • To understand the process of grieving • To acknowledge the pain • To take good physical and emotional care of yourself • To work through your emotions 	What Helps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make an effort to engage in new relationships and activities • To learn new roles, skills and responsibilities • To begin making choices about your future

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GRIEF and DEPRESSION

Feelings	Grief	Depression
Mood States	Greater range of moods and feelings Quick shifts from sadness to normal state in the same day Variability in mood, activity, communication, appetite, sexual interest in the same week	Moods & feelings are more static, little variability Consistent sense of depletion, psychomotor retardation, anorexia, decreased sexual interest Or Compulsive communication, eating, sexual behaviour
Expression of Anger	Open, externally directed	Absence of externally directed anger; internally directed
Expression of Sadness	Weeping	Difficulty weeping or controlling weeping
Self-Concept	Guilt associated with specific aspects of the loss Experience the world as empty Preoccupation with the loss	The loss confirms they are bad or worthless Focus on punitive thoughts, guilt has global aspect Preoccupation with self
Responsiveness	Periodic Want solitude but respond to warmth and involvement	Static Fear of being alone or unresponsiveness to others
Pleasure	Restricted for a time after the loss Retain sense of humour	Restrict all pleasure Loss of sense of humour
Reaction of Others	Others want to offer support	

EXPECTATIONS IN GRIEF

Some predictability in grief helps people to feel less out of control. Often there are misconceptions about what grief will be or should be like and how long it will go on. Good information about what to expect gives people permission to grieve in the own way and validates their experience.

Expectations You Can Have for Yourself in Grief	
You can expect that:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Your grief will take longer than most people think it should.	<input type="checkbox"/> You will feel guilt in some form.
<input type="checkbox"/> Your grief will take more energy than you can imagine.	<input type="checkbox"/> You may have a lack of self-concern and self-esteem .
<input type="checkbox"/> Your grief will involve continual changes .	<input type="checkbox"/> You may experience spasms or acute upsurges of grief that occur without warning.
<input type="checkbox"/> Your grief will show itself in all spheres of your life: psychological, social, physical, spiritual.	<input type="checkbox"/> You will have trouble thinking and making decisions : poor memory, organization and concentration.
<input type="checkbox"/> Your grief will depend upon how you perceive the loss.	<input type="checkbox"/> You will feel like you are going crazy .
<input type="checkbox"/> You will grieve for many things (both symbolic and tangible), not just the death itself.	<input type="checkbox"/> You may be obsessed with the death or preoccupied with the thoughts of the dead person.
<input type="checkbox"/> You will grieve for what you have lost already as well as for the future .	<input type="checkbox"/> You will search for meaning in/for your life and question your belief .
<input type="checkbox"/> Your grief will entail mourning for the hopes, dreams and unfulfilled expectations you held for and with that person.	<input type="checkbox"/> You will find yourself socially acting in different ways.
<input type="checkbox"/> Your grief will involve a wide variety of feelings and reactions: some expected, some not.	<input type="checkbox"/> Society will have unrealistic expectations about your mourning and may respond inappropriately.
<input type="checkbox"/> Your loss will resurrect old issues, feelings and unresolved conflicts from the past.	<input type="checkbox"/> You will have a number of physical reactions .
<input type="checkbox"/> You will have some identity confusion : due to the intensity and unfamiliarity of the grieving experience and uncertainty about your new role in the world.	<input type="checkbox"/> Certain dates , events, seasons and stimuli will bring upsurges in your grief.
<input type="checkbox"/> You may have a combination of anger and depression : irritability, frustration, annoyance, intolerance.	<input type="checkbox"/> Certain experiences later in life may resurrect intense grief feelings for you.

When people know that their feelings are 'expected responses' to loss, they begin to accept this process as normal. There are many 'expectations,' some or all of which grieving people will experience.