

COMMON GRIEF RESPONSES

Following are some common responses to loss. Everyone does not necessarily experience all of these responses, nor are they presented in any set order.

- **Shock/Numbness/Denial**

"I feel like I'm on 'automatic pilot.'" "This feels like a bad dream." "It can't be true."
You feel like a robot. You hear the words, but don't comprehend. You feel bewildered, stunned. Emotions seem frozen inside you. This is nature's way of "softening the blow," of helping to cushion your mind and heart until you can face the emotions of grief.

- **Anger**

"Why me?" "Why him?" "Why her?" "Why now?"
This is a very normal grief reaction and is often directed at ourselves, others, the person who died, or at God. It is important to release anger in healthy and appropriate ways (i.e. walking, swimming, cleaning, talking it out, etc.). Repressed anger can lead to illness and depression.

- **Guilt**

"If only..." "Did I do enough?" "Did I do the right thing?"
You may find you blame yourself for something you did/didn't do or something you wish you would have done. These feelings are normal, though not always realistic. Talk these feelings over with someone who will listen. Eventually you will come to realize that we do the best we can do with what we know at the time!

- **Relief**

"At last it's over!" "I'm glad he is no longer suffering."
A sense of relief naturally follows the long-term caring for a loved one. The relief is for oneself as well as the suffering our loved one endured. Accept this natural emotion without feeling guilty for feeling this way.

- **Anxiety/Panic**

"Am I going crazy?" "Will I always feel like this?"
You are afraid to be alone. You worry about the future. You fear something else will happen to you. You fear you are losing control. Call someone, talk about these feelings, exercise, walk. All may help release these feelings of panic and anxiety. See a professional if these feelings persist and/or become more debilitating.

- **Depression**

“What’s the use?” “How can I go on?” “Life is the pits.”

You hurt so much. Sometimes you just sit. The sadness seems heavy. It is difficult to concentrate, be with other people, enjoy things. You feel helpless and hopeless. Occasionally you have suicidal thoughts. (“How can I go on without him/her?”) Depression can also manifest itself physically: loss of appetite, sleeping problems, fatigue, headaches, backaches, stomach distress. Some depression is a very normal part of grief and, once experienced, will dissipate. Talking it through with others is extremely therapeutic. Doing something special for yourself or for someone else can also be helpful. If depression persists and seriously interferes with daily living, or if you are seriously considering ending your own life, please seek professional assistance immediately.

- **Sadness/Loneliness**

*“The house seems so empty.” “Nights are the hardest.”
“I’ve not only lost my husband, but my friends, too.”*

The initial visitors have gone. Everyone returns to their daily business and you are left to face your grief alone. The sadness and emptiness is often overwhelming. Support groups can be invaluable at this time. Not only do they provide the opportunity to share your pain, but you can often learn new ways of coping in the process.

- **Confusion/Difficulty Concentrating**

“I feel like I’m losing my mind.” “I can’t think anymore.”

You feel disorganized, absent-minded. It is difficult to concentrate. You forget where you put your keys or where you parked your car. You have difficulty following a conversation. All this is natural part of the grieving process. Your energy is focused on your heart, not your head. Be gentle and patient with yourself. Make lists. Ask others to remind you of important dates/times. This will pass.

- **Grieving Behaviors**

You visit the cemetery often or refuse to go at all. You carry around objects or photos of your loved one, or you painfully avoid all reminders. You talk to your loved one as you go about your day. You find yourself repeatedly reviewing the events leading up to the death. You dream of your loved one or become upset because you are not dreaming of them. You are preoccupied with your loved one’s image or sense their presence near you. You believe you heard their voice or have seen “glimpses” of your loved one. You are not “going crazy”. This is all a very natural part of grieving.