



Losing a loved one can shake a person's world. Each of us will mourn, heal and rebuild in our own unique way. **Grief's Passage** seeks to offer you information, practical tools, inspiration and hope as you make this journey. In this issue we look at the range of reactions and challenges that often occur when a person has suffered a recent and profound loss. We invite you to visit our website, www.hospicegso.org, for more information about grief and the programs offered by the Counseling and Education Center. You can call us at **336.621.5565** or email us at thecenter@hospicegso.org, if you would like to meet with a bereavement counselor or register for one of our programs.

What Grief May Ask of Us

If you are deeply grieving a loss, you may find that you feel very strange and unlike your normal self. What follows is a list of common reactions to such a loss. Know that these reactions are quite normal, and are generally experienced temporarily as we struggle to come to terms with our loss and our new reality.

Grief can bring on an avalanche of different **emotions**:

- Intense sadness.
- Anger (why).
- Emptiness or loneliness.
- Anxiety and fear.
- Helplessness and hopelessness.
- Hope.
- Gratitude.
- Numbness (cannot cry or feeling like in a fog).
- Shock (it doesn't seem real).
- Guilt and regret (if only or what if).
- Resentment and jealousy (this is not fair).
- Overwhelmed (so much to do, so little energy).
- Relief (no more suffering, no more burden).

Grief can affect our mind and our **thinking** temporarily:

- Forgetful or cannot concentrate.
- Cannot stop thinking about the death.
- Think of self as less competent.
- Think of self as less worthwhile.
- Have trouble making decisions.
- Denial to ourselves that the death is real.
- Think we are responsible for the death.
- Have nightmares.

Grief can be felt **physically** as well:

- Not sleeping well.
- No appetite and weight loss.
- Tired all the time or no energy.
- Sleeping too much.
- Increased appetite and weight gain.
- Nervous energy or cannot sit still.
- Stomach aches or head aches.
- Slower reactions.
- Heart beats rapidly or feel shaky.
- More susceptible to infections.

Many of us experience grief at a **spiritual** level:

- Feeling closer to God.
- Feeling angry with God.
- Questioning or rethinking one's religious beliefs.
- Questioning meaning of life or one's own purpose.
- Feeling the presence of the person who died.

What may surprise you is that you could have many positive experiences, even in the midst of your darkest grief, such as moments of laughter, appreciation, gratitude, love, joy and compassion, surges of energy and the occasional sense of peace. Although these much needed breaks from grief do not tend to last very long in the early weeks, they give us hope for healing and a better future. Embrace these moments!

Is it OK to be doing OK?

"I feel very sad, but overall I am doing all right. I certainly have tough times, but I am making it through most days surprisingly well. Is this normal?"

Yes, it is very normal. While many people grieve some losses deeply for months and years, others find their balance quickly. Most of us will heal well eventually. You just might be someone who will get there sooner and with less pain.

Remember, too, that all losses are not the same. We all will lose a number of loved ones in our lifetime: most of the time we will manage our grief fairly well. Once in a while, a loss will knock the wind out of us and we will grieve far more deeply for far longer.

When should I be concerned about myself or loved one?

If you or a loved one are having suicidal thoughts or if you are overusing alcohol or medications, we strongly suggest that you contact a doctor immediately.

"Falling Apart"

I seem to be falling apart.

My attention span can be measured in seconds,

My patience in minutes,

I cry at the drop of a hat

I forget things constantly

The morning toast burns daily.

I forget to sign checks; half of everything in the house is misplaced.

Feelings of anxiety and restlessness are my constant companions.

Rainy days seem extra dreary

Sunny days seem an outrage,

Other people's pain and frustrations seem insignificant.

Laughing, happy people seem out of place in my world.

It has become routine to feel half crazy.

"I am normal," I am told.

"I am a newly grieving person."

– Eloise Cole

Finding Your Way Through Early Grief

Suggestions for Coping

Be kind to yourself. It can be frustrating to feel so unlike yourself and so unable to function in your typical way. But try not to be self-critical. It is just what grief often looks like.

Be patient with yourself. It is so common for grieving persons to say, "I have stacks of papers all over my kitchen table, and I can't seem to get motivated to do any of it." There can be a lot of new and difficult tasks to complete, at a time when your energy and spirits are lagging. Break down difficult tasks into smaller steps. Ask a friend or family member to help you complete a tough task.

Make only the decisions that you must make, and complete the tasks that must be done. As for the rest of it, take your time. This generally is not a good time to make

major life decisions unless absolutely necessary. Don't let well-intentioned loved ones pressure you to do so.

Pay attention to your health. Try to guide your body back to its normal rhythms, by setting up regular sleeping and eating schedules. Engage in some kind of consistent, gentle exercise, such as a daily walk or an exercise class. This won't work miracles, but it can go a long way in helping you manage the stress you are under. If you are due or overdue for a physical, call your doctor and make an appointment.

Accept the support of others. Let people bring you food or offer you company and comfort. This is your time of need. In the future, you can pay it forward.

Family turmoil?

If your family is having its share of turmoil, such as anger, misunderstanding, hurt, resentment, you are not alone. Illness and death often bring a host of strains and stresses on family relationships.

- One person has been helping out a lot and another family member is nowhere to be found.
- Difficult treatment decisions had to be made and not everyone was in agreement.
- The estate is being settled and property is being divided up.
- Decisions still need to be made, and loved ones often need more attention.
- Some are disappointed that their family members have not offered more comfort and companionship to help fill the void left by their loved one's death.

Virginia Satir once said that a family is like a mobile that hangs from a ceiling. Each piece is balanced with each other. But, when one piece is taken away, everything changes, and everything is out of balance. When one family member is taken away, there is almost always a sense of imbalance and uncertainty. Relationships change, roles change, patterns of interaction change and ways of getting needs met are changed.

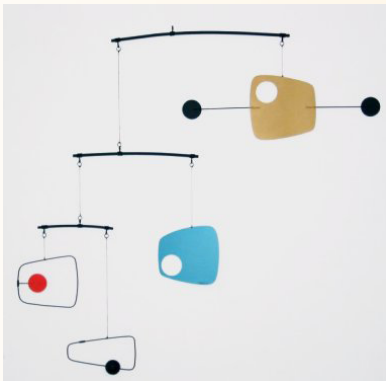


Image courtesy of www.the-mobile-factory.com

Each family will find its own way to a new equilibrium. Tolerance and respect, honest communication and the passage of time can all help. It may also help to decide what you value the most – fairness or family unity. It can be natural in a time of added burden on a family to focus on fairness, but fairness is a rare thing in the real world.

How do you grieve?

What is your way of grieving? Which of these help you most?

Expressing emotions: crying, journaling or sharing your experience with others.

Thinking: seeking to understand why and how, reading, talking, spiritual reflection or remembering.

Doing: taking on a project, taking action to honor or remember him or her or tackling the new challenges and tasks that come with loss.

Do men and women grieve differently? Yes and no. More women than men say they benefit from letting out their emotions. More men than women express benefit from thinking and doing. But we all tend to do some of each.

An example: A husband and wife might both go to the grave sight to seek comfort. The wife might get relief there by talking to her loved one and shedding tears. The husband may get relief by going there regularly to maintain the grounds, ensuring that his loved one's site is well cared for or as a way to stay connected. There are different ways to heal.

Bridging the gap. Often family members are mystified and uncomfortable with the way others in the family are expressing (or not expressing) their grief. In the spirit of mutual support during this difficult time, try the following:

- Honor each other's ways of expression and respect their timing and process.
- Do not ask the other person to participate heavily in your way of grief.
- Come together to support each other however you can, whether it is helping each other eat well, get exercise or find solutions to the challenges your family faces.

Going Back to Work, School or Faith Community: the Challenge of Re-entry

Many people feel anxious and awkward about returning to their social world after a significant death. You may be afraid you will burst in to tears if approached by friends, family and coworkers. Or, that well meaning people will blurt out things like “They’re in a better place,” “It was their time,” or “I know just how you feel.” These statements can often feel inappropriate or unwarranted. When told to “Just stay busy” or “Stay strong,” these statements can feel cold and frustrating. Friends with caring intentions may be at a loss for what to say and may even avoid you because of their own discomfort. Social situations can feel like a mine field after a loss.

What might help: Plan for social situations and have a practiced answer to the question “How are you?” This way, you can choose who you are honest with, and have a ready answer for those times when you don’t want to engage. We may need to be honest with those we care about when their comments are less than helpful. Sometimes our well meaning loved ones may need some advice from us on how to best support us.

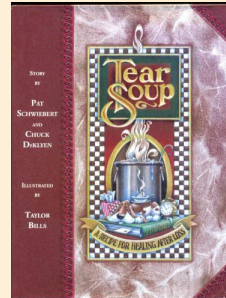
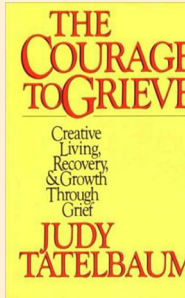
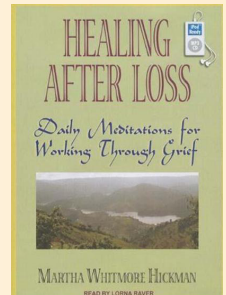
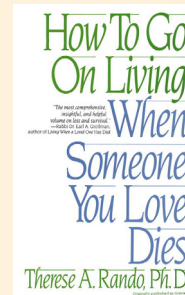
Is journaling for you?

Some grieving people find it helps to write in order to relieve the pressure of too many intense emotions or to untangle the many thoughts and concerns they have. Others find that they want to write to remember the little details, the good times and the love. Some use a journal as a way to continue to communicate their thoughts and feelings with their deceased loved one. Still, others write because they want to chronicle this challenging time in their lives.

“I wrote a letter to my husband shortly after he died. I told him about the events surrounding his death and funeral. I told him how I was feeling and doing. I thanked him for all the blessings he bestowed upon me. I told him my regrets. A few months later, I wrote another letter to him, and then another. After two years I had written seven letters. These letters, which sat at the bottom of my night stand drawer, ended up being so valuable to me. When I looked back at earlier letters, I was astounded at how much progress I had made over the months, even though at the time I would have told you I was stuck. Without these letters, I never could have realized how much I had been through, and how far I had come.”

If you think that writing might help you, we encourage you to do so. If you would like ideas to get started, you can look on our website www.hospicegso.org or call us at **336.621.5565** and we will send you a packet of ideas for journaling.

Books that May Offer Comfort



The Counseling and Education Center houses a small grief library. We welcome you to stop in and borrow a book or two.

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