

ESTABLISHING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS FOR YOUR GRIEF

Holding on to myths about grief can hinder your healing process and set you up for unnecessary frustration. Conversely, establishing more realistic expectations for yourself in grief can facilitate your healing and ease the burden. The following is a list of appropriate expectations you can have for yourself in grief.

- Your healing will take longer than most people think.
- Your grief work will require more energy than you might have imagined.
- Your grief will not remain static over time. Grief evolves and unfolds and is, therefore, continually changing and developing.
- Your grief will have an impact on all areas of your life; social, physical, and emotional.
- Your grief will not follow a logical progression of decreasing intensity. The grief process is much more like a roller coaster, with dramatic ups and downs, or an ocean wave that sometimes feels like a small wave at your feet and sometimes it's a tidal wave that knocks you down rather than it is a logical, step-by-step progression.
- How you grieve will depend on how you perceive the loss.
- You will grieve not only for the person who has died, but also for all of the hopes and dreams you held for the future and all of your needs that can no longer be fulfilled by the person who has died.
- Your grief will involve a wider range of feelings than those typically recognized as grief such as sadness or depression. You may also experience guilt, anger, frustration, resentment, intolerance and irritability. There is no one, all-inclusive list of appropriate grief feelings. Remember, feelings are not good or bad, right or wrong, they just are. Give yourself permission to feel and express whatever emotions you are currently experiencing.
- This loss may trigger feelings of grief for earlier losses that were not resolved or recognized at the time of the loss. Coming to terms with earlier unresolved losses may be part of dealing with your current loss. Look at this as an opportunity to heal old wounds and to free yourself of burdens that you may have been carrying for a long time.
- Grief often involves an identity crisis. You will have to figure out who you are now without the person who has died.
- At times you may doubt your sanity and fear that you are going crazy.

HOW CAN I HELP MYSELF

Give yourself permission to grieve. Some days you can handle the feelings that surface, and some days you may "fall apart." These "ups and downs" are a natural reaction to loss.

- Go ahead and cry. Tears are a natural and necessary part of grieving. They are not a sign of weakness; they are a sign that you have loved.
- Express feelings of anger with someone you trust. Suppressed anger can lead to prolonged depression and poor physical health.
- Tell people what you need. People may avoid you because they are afraid that they will say the wrong thing. When you let others know what you need, they are usually grateful and relieved.
- Be good to yourself. Get the rest you need, balanced with regular exercise and a good diet. You may not feel motivated to do these things now, but they are crucial to your physical and mental well-being.
- Give in ways that you can. Giving to others will assist you in your own healing. Consider joining a grief support group. As you benefit from the love and courage of group members, your presence and personal story will also be helpful to them.
- Write in a journal. Record your thoughts and feelings. Get them "out of your system."
- Do not make major decisions too quickly. Change requires lots of energy. Put that energy into taking good care of yourself.
- Maintain a support system. Whether they are family or friends, make sure you have someone to talk to
- Believe in yourself. Think of all the reasons your loved one cared for you. These qualities are still present and will help you find strength and meaning in the future.

