



Anger and Grief

There are many emotions that come with the death of a loved one - sadness, regret, loneliness, fear, anxiety, emptiness, gratitude, and anger. For many people the anger doesn't seem right or acceptable, yet it is one of the normal and common reactions to loss.

People feel anger at the medical establishment, anger at relatives who may not have helped or supported the person who died, anger at God, anger at themselves – the WHY questions are paramount. Why did God let this happen, why didn't she go to see her doctor sooner, why didn't the doctor diagnose and treat this better, why her when she was such a good person, why me? It is very common and normal to feel angry at the person who died, to feel abandoned even in the same moment as rationally knowing that the person did not choose to die and did not want to die. The death changes your whole life, your future, your dreams, your plans for the day, month, and years ahead – of course it is normal to feel angry! Anger is normal, but often people “stuff” their anger because they deem it to be an unacceptable emotion. Realize all emotions are acceptable – they just ARE. There is no right or wrong emotion. It is what one does with an emotion that makes it helpful or hurtful. When anger is “stuffed” it often comes out in physical symptoms or turns into depression. Anger can be suppressed for some time, but it usually builds and builds until it comes up suddenly and often unpleasantly in a totally unrelated situation, such as becoming unduly irritated at work or at home and overreacting to something that normally would not cause a big response.

So what do you do with your anger? First of all, express it. Choose someone whom you trust to listen without trying to suppress your expression or “fix” you. Then let out your anger in words. Another option is to take some time by yourself to “write out” your anger. Don't hold back! Go ahead and rant and rave and get it all out. Both experiences may prove to be very freeing. We also hold anger as a physical force within ourselves, so finding a physical outlet is very healthy. Pound a pillow, kick a ball, chop wood, do some vigorous exercise, or yell loudly in a place where others will not hear you. Connecting with nature can also help dispel anger – being outside, walking in a park, in the woods, or along a stream.

For many people, animals can also be a source of support and comfort. Dogs are chosen as therapy animals for a reason; they have an emotional intelligence and sensitivity to our pain.

Finally, anger can be a driving force for making positive change. Mothers Against Drunk Driving was started by mothers who were angry because so many people drove under the influence. Putting energy into supporting cancer walks, heart walks, and other organizations that seek a cure for disease can take your anger and direct it in a way that helps others. Helping others is a way to also help yourself.

Accept your anger. Express your anger. Use your anger. It is normal. It is OK.