

Grief – A Normal and Natural Response to Loss

Starting in childhood, many people have been taught to face life's crises with a "stiff upper lip", to "bear up and be strong". As we are influenced by these subconscious messages, we may become fearful that any show of emotion, particularly tears, might be interpreted by others as a sign of weakness; i.e., "He's falling apart" or "She's going to pieces."

One of the tragedies in our society today is that many bereaved family members and friends experience their grief alone, feeling "There must be something wrong with me." Fearful of embarrassment, or of appearing "crazy" to others, many bereaved persons hide their true feelings of grief.

It is important for you to realize that what you are experiencing is a normal, natural, and expected response to the loss of a significant person in your life. Your grief reaction may manifest itself in any one or more of the following ways described by other bereaved persons.

"I feel sick to my stomach, I just can't eat!"

"I have trouble getting to sleep and after I finally do, I only sleep for a few hours before I'm up again."

Other physical reactions: weakness—pounding and/or heaving feeling in the chest—shortness of breath.

"I can't seem to get organized. I'm up and down a hundred times during the day—here and there—never accomplishing anything."

"I keep thinking about how it all happened—over and over again in my mind. I guess I'm trying to make some sense out of it all."

"I think I'm losing my mind. I can't concentrate on anything. I can't even decide what to wear today."

"Yesterday I heard my loved one call for me in the night, and today I thought I saw him rocking in his chair."

Other mental manifestations: lack of initiative, forgetfulness, tension and anxiety.

“If only I had told him/her one more time, ‘I love you.’” “He should have gone to the doctor months ago.”

“The nights and weekends are the worst for me—empty and lonely.”

“It’s as if anytime now he’ll call or come walking through the door. I keep thinking of things to tell him.”

Other emotional reactions: feelings of relief, anguish, depression, unexpected and uncontrolled crying.

“I thought this would bring us closer together; instead, we constantly bicker. When I’m feeling up, he’s depressed; and when he’s up, I’m down.”

Other social reactions: tendency to respond to others with anger or irritability—loss of spontaneity.

“If my faith were strong, I would be able to handle this.”

“If I really believed, this wouldn’t have happened.”

Other spiritual reactions: anger with God, doubts about the reality of God’s existence.