



Victim Services
Working with police to help crime and trauma victims

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DEALING WITH GRIEF PACKAGE

- **Grief Expectations You Can Have For Yourself**
- **But You're Absolutely Normal**
- **Grieving as a Family**
- **Grief...How to Help Yourself Through Birthdays, Anniversaries, Holidays and Other Occasions**



GRIEF EXPECTATIONS YOU CAN HAVE FOR YOURSELF

You can expect that:

- ❖ Your grief may take longer than most people think it should
- ❖ Your grief may take more energy than you can imagine
- ❖ Your grief may show itself in all spheres of your life; social, physical, emotional, thinking, spiritual
- ❖ Your grief will depend upon how you perceived the loss
- ❖ You may grieve for many things (both symbolic and tangible), not just the death itself
- ❖ You may grieve for what you have lost already as well as for the future; for the hopes, dreams and unfulfilled expectations you expected for and with that person
- ❖ Your grief will involve a wide variety of feelings and reactions – some expected, some not
- ❖ Your loss may resurrect old issues, feelings and unresolved conflicts from the past
- ❖ You may have some identity confusion due to the intensity and unfamiliarity of the grieving experience and uncertainty about your new role in the world
- ❖ You may have a combination of anger and depression – irritability, frustration, intolerance
- ❖ You may feel guilty in some form
- ❖ You may have a lack of self-concern and poor self-worth
- ❖ You may experience spasms, waves or acute upsurges of grief that occur without warning
- ❖ You may have trouble thinking and making decisions – poor memory and organization
- ❖ You may feel like you are going crazy
- ❖ You may be obsessed with the death or preoccupied with thoughts of the dead person
- ❖ You may search for meaning in / for your life and question your beliefs
- ❖ You may find yourself acting differently
- ❖ Remember that society has unrealistic expectations about your mourning and may respond inappropriately
- ❖ You may have a number of physical reactions
- ❖ Certain dates, events, seasons and reminders will bring upsurges in your grief
- ❖ Certain experiences later in life may resurrect intense grief feelings for you

THIS IS ALL NORMAL

If you have noticed problems with your physical health, it is important to check in with your doctor

GRIEVING AS A FAMILY

Communication is the key to coping and growing as a family through grief. It is important to be together to talk, cry, rage or even sit in silence. At the same time there should be respect for each person's way of handling the grief. Some family members will grieve privately, others openly and others a combination of these two styles. In many ways, each family member must grieve alone.

Here are some suggestions that may help with family grief:

- ❖ Expect that each family member will grieve in their own particular way and at their own pace. This may affect your ability to support one another.
- ❖ Even though you may be really focused on the death of one person, remember that remaining family members continue to need your time, attention and love.
- ❖ Try to find a balance between what is missing and what is here.
- ❖ Try to be sensitive to each other's feelings. Feelings are often difficult to verbalize. Listen to what is meant as well as to what is said.
- ❖ Hugs, a hand on the arm or back gives comfort and a sense of closeness.
- ❖ It may be helpful to set aside time to be 'alone together' as a family or to even hold a family meeting. Encourage but don't pressure family members to talk and express grief in their own way. Be careful not to give each other the silent treatment. Make sure the person who has died continues to be part of the family conversations.
- ❖ Plan together for family projects or trips.
- ❖ A family diary or scrapbook in which each family member contributes a writing or drawing can be a way to help you remember and talk about the family member who died.
- ❖ Remember, the life stages of family member's affects how they deal with their grief. So too does their personality, life experiences and support systems.
- ❖ Discuss changes in family duties and roles for the survivors of the family. Don't expect another family member to replace or to be the same as the member who died. For example, expecting a young boy whose father died to be 'the man of the house' or a daughter whose sibling died to be the same in schoolwork and sports may complicate their grieving.
- ❖ Recognize that anniversaries, birthdays and special holidays may be difficult for your family. Talk together about what you want to do on these occasions.
- ❖ Remember, if grief or family problems feel overwhelming, seek professional help.

BUT YOU'RE ABSOLUTELY NORMAL....

Grief is a normal reaction to loss and it shows up in ways you might not expect.

If you've:

- ❖ Been angry with doctors or nurses for not doing enough
- ❖ Been angry with yourself for not taking more heroic steps
- ❖ Been sleeping too much or not enough
- ❖ Noticed a change in appetite
- ❖ Felt that no one understands what you're going through
- ❖ Felt that friends should call more or call less or leave you alone or invite you along more often
- ❖ Bought things you didn't need
- ❖ Considered selling everything and moving
- ❖ Had headaches, upset stomach, weakness or lethargy
- ❖ Been unbearably lonely and depressed
- ❖ Cried for no apparent reason
- ❖ Found yourself obsessed with thoughts of the deceased
- ❖ Been forgetful, confused, uncharacteristically absent-minded
- ❖ Panicked over little things
- ❖ Felt guilty about things you have or haven't done
- ❖ Forgotten why you went somewhere
- ❖ Called friends and wanted to hang up after only a brief conversation
- ❖ Not wanted to attend social functions you usually enjoyed
- ❖ Been angry for being left alone
- ❖ Found yourself unable to concentrate on written material
- ❖ Been unable to remember what you just read

...you're absolutely normal. These are all common grief reactions; you may have experienced one, a few, many or none of the above. Grief is a very complex experience. Everyone experiences grief differently, and there is no fixed time to indicate when you will feel 'normal' again. You'll never forget the person who died, but your life will again become alright, although it will never be the same. **Take care of yourself.**

GRIEF....HOW TO HELP YOURSELF THROUGH BIRTHDAYS, ANNIVERSARIES, HOLIDAYS AND OTHER OCCASIONS

For many people, these types of days can be particularly challenging and can mean 'family together time'. You may find yourself wanting to skip over a few days and it can be very hard to enjoy these days when you realize the person is no longer alive to enjoy them.

Here are some suggestions that may help you make these occasions easier.

- ❖ Family get-togethers may be extremely difficult. Be honest with each other about your feelings, sit down and decide what you all want to do for these types of days. Don't set expectations too high for yourself or other family on that day.
- ❖ There is no right or wrong way to handle the day. Some people prefer to follow family traditions, while others decided to change them – it may help to do things just a little differently. Remember, what you choose this time can always be changed next year.
- ❖ Be careful of "shoulds" – it is better to do what feels best for you and your family, not what you or others think you should do. Give yourself permission to not do things. Once you have decided how your family will handle these occasions, let others know.
- ❖ These days are tiring; get lots of rest. You need every bit of your strength.
- ❖ For holiday dinners, you may decide to visit family or friends. If you have dinner at home, try changing the menu, the time or the room. You may want to be involved in preparing the meal, or not.
- ❖ Be gentle with yourself and don't expect too much. If you cry, don't let that ruin the day for you. It's OK to cry.
- ❖ As these types of days approach, share your concerns, feelings and apprehensions with someone. Let them know what is difficult for you; accept their offerings of help. Significant dates often magnify feelings of loss; allow yourself to experience the sadness that comes.

Christmas Holidays can be particularly difficult. Here are a few specific suggestions:

- ❖ Do the Christmas preparations that you enjoy and look for alternatives for those you don't. For example, this year you could buy baked goods, let other bake or do without.
- ❖ If you decide to decorate your home, let children, other family members or friends help you. It's OK to do something different, or to do no decorating at all.
- ❖ How do you respond to "Merry Christmas?" You could say "best wishes to you" or "thank you". Think of how you will respond ahead of time.
- ❖ Consider not sending cards this year. It is not essential to send cards, especially to those you will see over the holidays.

- ❖ Christmas shopping can be upsetting and it may help you to shop early, to shop by telephone or online or to take an understanding friend. Family may be willing to shop for you if they realize how difficult this is for you.

Often, the first year of bereavement, people expect you to be 'over it'...you will never be over it. However, most people do find that eventually they are able to enjoy these occasions.

