

## GRIEF - A NORMAL REACTION TO LOSS

Grief differs based on who we are, whom or what we have lost, and how much our day-to-day life is altered by the loss. A normal reaction to loss, grief is unique in its impact, course and meaning to each of us. While every change brings about a loss, experiencing the loss of a partner, a parent or sibling, or a lifelong friend, with whom we share history, often has special meaning to us and hits us even harder.

Thinking about reactions to the loss of a loved one, we tend to think only of the emotional reactions. Yet, people also experience physical and behavioral reactions. The intensity of grief changes over time and through personal growth as we strive for a “new normal” without our loved one in our lives. Some of the most typical emotional, physical, and behavioral reactions include the following:

Immediate Reactions—The first few weeks following death:

- Emotional: Shock, Relief, Release
- Physical: Numbness, Shortness of breath, Heavy chest, Empty feeling
- Behavioral: Denial, Disorientation, Crying, Listlessness

Later Reactions—After the shock wears off, you begin to feel your feelings once again:

- Emotional: Anger, Fear, Guilt, Panic, Loneliness, Depression
- Physical: Chest pains, Lack of energy, Headaches, Fatigue, Vulnerability to illness, Tension
- Behavioral: Over-reactive, Hyper-sensitive, Running, Sleeplessness, Isolation, Need to relive the loss

Adjustment—A time when you think you are going to "make it":

- Emotional: Taking responsibility, Reconstructing your life
- Physical: Looking forward, Doing things for oneself
- Behavioral: Exploring new interests, Personal growth

Remember everyone's reactions and grief are different. The above lists are guides and should not be considered all-inclusive. Grief is a process that takes considerable time. If you are in doubt about some of your reactions or those of a loved one, consult your physician or mental health practitioner. If outside help is needed, don't be afraid to ask for it.

### Personal Adjustments

For weeks after a death, most caring families and friends do all that they can to comfort us, making life as comfortable as possible. Many times, we are still in shock, accepting this support in a daze. Gradually, those around us return to their normal lives, but we do not. The reality of the situation may lead you to think "I am alone," but you are not.

## Core needs of people who are grieving

- Understanding
- Comfort
- Reassurance
- Sharing memories with others
- Rituals
- Symbols
- Rest
- Patience
- Restructuring relationships
- Forgiving
- Time
- Self-care
- Finding a “new normal”