

Dealing with Grief

This checklist highlights a few important matters to consider during bereavement. Each person is different so beware of ready made solutions. The following are suggestions to consider; they may or may not fit your situation. These may be considered under the headings: Psychological, Physical, Social, Economic and Spiritual.

Psychological

Everyone needs some help—don't be afraid to accept it. While you may feel pressured to put on a brave front, it is important to make your needs known by expressing your feelings to those you trust.

Often numbness sees us through the first few days or weeks. Don't be too surprised if a let-down comes later.

Many people are more emotionally upset during bereavement than at any other time in their lives and are frightened by this. Be aware that severe upset is not unusual and if you are alarmed, seek a professional opinion.

Whether you feel you need to be alone or accompanied—make it known. Needing company is common and does *not* mean you will *always* be dependent on it. There is no set time limit for grieving. It varies from person to person, depending on individual circumstances.

Physical

It is easy to neglect yourself because you don't much care at a time of grief. You are under great stress and may be more susceptible to disease.

It is especially important not to neglect your health. Try to eat reasonably even if there is no enjoyment in it. Although sleep may be disturbed, try to get adequate rest.

If you have symptoms, get a doctor to check them out. If people urge you to see your doctor, do so even if it doesn't make sense to you at the time.

Social

Friends and family are often most available early in bereavement and less so later. It is important to be able to reach out to them when you need them. Don't wait for them to guess your needs. They will often guess incorrectly and too late.

During a period of grief it can be difficult to judge new relationships. Don't be afraid of them, yet it is usually wise not to rush into them. Someone who is not too close to you

but who is willing to listen may be particularly helpful. No one will substitute for your loss. Try to enjoy people as they are. Do not avoid social contacts because of the imperfections in those you meet.

Sometimes, in an effort to stop the pain of grief, people turn towards replacing the lost person (such as adoption of a child, remarriage) too soon. It is hard, though, to see new relationships objectively if you are still actively grieving and this kind of solution may only lead to other problems.

Try to make clear to children that sadness is perfectly normal and that neither theirs nor yours need to be hidden. It is important that periods of happiness are enjoyed and not a cause of guilty feelings.

Economic

Avoid hasty decisions. Try not to make major life decisions within the first year unless absolutely necessary. In general, most people find it best to remain settled in familiar surroundings until they can consider their future calmly.

Don't be afraid to seek good advice. Usually it is wise to get more than one opinion before making decisions. Don't make any major financial decisions without taking them over with experts.

Having a job or doing voluntary work in the community can be helpful when you are ready but it is important not to overextend yourself. A job will not fulfill all your needs and you should not turn to excessive involvement in work. Relationships with family and friends should not be sacrificed in an effort to keep busy.

Spiritual

Personal faith is frequently a major source of comfort during bereavement. For some, however, maintaining faith may be difficult during this period of loss. Either reaction may occur, and both are consistent with later spiritual growth.

Adapted from material prepared for the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry Public Forum, October 27, 1976, by staff of the Community Resources Service and Community Contacts for the Widowed.