

Checklist: Healthy Responses to Grief

These are just some possible feelings you may experience during your grieving process.

When a Death Occurs

After the death you will have feelings that this has happened. You may be overwhelmed, panicked and experience strong physical reactions.

Your grief task here is to move from denial to acceptance that the death really has occurred.

Feelings:

- Numbness, empty
- Indifferent to daily activities
- Withdrawn or explosive
- Needing to review death

Thoughts:

- Confusion, sense of unreality
- Poor concentration, forgetfulness
- Denial, disbelief
- Daydreaming
- Constant thoughts about person

Body:

- Tight chest, palpitations
- Shortness of breath
- Diarrhea, constipation, vomiting
- Crying, sighing
- Lack of energy, weakness, rigidity
- Dizziness, shivering, faintness
- Restlessness
- Loss of appetite
- Insomnia or sleeping too much

Social:

- Distance from or dependence on others
- Lack of interest in other's activities
- Unrealistic expectations
- Poor judgment about relationships

Spiritual:

- Blaming God or life
- Lack of meaning or direction
- Wanting to die/to join the dead person

What Helps:

- To talk about the person and the death frequently
- To know others experience the same reactions to death
- To feel there are practical and emotional supports available

Confronting the Pain

Later, when the numbness wears off, you will begin to feel the emotional pain of grieving. The intensity of this pain may surprise and frighten you but it is healthy and it will gradually lessen as you live with it.

Your grief task is to acknowledge, experience, and work through your feelings of hopelessness, yearning and despair.

Feelings:

- Feelings are acute, conflicting, extreme
- Anger, sadness, guilt
- Feeling lost, overwhelmed
- Generalize anxiety, depression
- Unrealistic fears about others or self

Thoughts:

- Forgetfulness, daydreaming, confusion
- Denial of meaning of death
- Denial of irreversibility of death
- Inability to concentrate or comprehend
- Sense of going crazy, losing touch with reality

Body:

- Tight chest, shortness of breath
- Diarrhea, constipation
- Restlessness, aimless activity
- Gut-wrenching gnawing emptiness
- Sharp pangs that cut into heart
- Nightmares, vivid dreams, hallucinations
- Change in appetite
- Change in sleep pattern
- Experiencing symptoms of dead person

Social:

- Continued distance, lack of interest
- Needing company but unable to ask
- Looking for replacement relationships
- Self-consciousness

Spiritual:

- Continued blaming
- Lack of meaning
- Trying to contact the dead person

What Helps:

- To realize what this death means to you, now and in the future
- To understand the process of grieving
- To acknowledge the pain
- To take good physical and emotional care of yourself
- To work through your emotions

Re-establishing Connections

Finally your grief will become less acute and you will once again have the energy and desire to reconnect with the world.

Your grief task is to adjust to a life without the deceased: to reinvest your energy in new activities and relationships.

Feelings:

- Emotions settle down, less extreme
- Feeling of coming out of the fog
- More peace and happiness
- Some guilt about how life goes on

Thoughts:

- Awareness and acceptance of death
- Fewer thoughts of being crazy
- Increased perspective about the death
- Ability to remember with less pain
- Improved concentration

Body:

- Fewer sleepless nights
- Dreams and hallucinations decrease
- Physical symptoms subside
- Appetite returns to normal
- Gut-wrenching emptiness is gone

Social:

- Interest in other's daily affairs
- Ability to reach out
- Energy for new relationships
- Desire for independence resurfaces

Spiritual:

- Reconnection with religious beliefs
- New direction, life has meaning
- Accepting death as part of life

What Helps:

- To make an effort to engage in new relationships and activities
- To learn new roles, skills and responsibilities
- To begin making choices about your future

Adapted from: Victoria Hospice Society