

Bereaved Families of Cape Breton

Grief....Emotions

When someone important to you dies, you grieve. Whenever you have any kind of loss, you need to grieve its disappearance from your life.

Grief means you have many reactions in widely contrasting combinations. These are *healthy responses to loss* and are an important part of the “work” you do to deal with your grief and move on in your life.

You will be very aware of strong, often mixed emotions after a death or loss. These may come and go; like waves washing over you. The intensity of your emotions may be new for you, perhaps frightening or overwhelming.

Some emotions may be like the ones mentioned here, others may be different. Everyone moves through grief in their own way and at their own pace.

In the beginning...

You may be in *shock*. You are bewildered, literally stunned. “I feel like a spectator in a play. But the drama is about me and the person I loved.” You may feel numb all over, almost paralysed in a world of unreality.

You don't want to believe it. “It's a bad dream. When I wake up, I'll find it really didn't happen.” *Denial* is when you secretly think or pretend your loved one will return and life will go on as before. It is so strange. You feel as if the death has not really occurred, even though you know it has. Many people need time before they can face the harsh truth. It is so hard to realize that in your lifetime you will never see or touch the person again.

Panic may set in. “What will happen to me?” “I'll never make it alone.” “Why can't I get hold of myself?” You feel like you are losing control, panicking over things you used to do with confidence. “If only I could run away, somewhere, anywhere!”

Later...

Emotional pain often brings *physical distress*. For example, inside your chest you may feel a sharp pain, as if a jagged rock is pressed against your ribs. You collapse, exhausted, into bed but cannot sleep. Food may have little taste for you. You eat only because you think you should. Or else, you just cannot stop eating. Your stomach may be tied in knots. Your back may be hurting. The pain is not imagined, it is real. Your body is feeling your emotional loss.

Many people become *angry* when someone close to them dies. “Why me?” “Why her?” “What did I do to deserve this?” Hostility is one of the most difficult emotions to handle. Many of us are taught as children that anger is an unacceptable feeling and we learn to hold it inside from a very early age. But feelings of rage do not magically go away. Expressing your anger helps you to release your anguish and your frustrations. A life that is precious to you has been taken away and there is nothing you can do about it. Resentment is a normal part of the grief process.

You may feel *guilty* or angry with yourself. You keep saying to yourself: “If only I had spent more time with him, if only I had been more understanding, if only I had called the doctor sooner, if only I had done this, if only I had done that...” Know that this is a common feeling and it will soften, as you are able to remember when you did achieve. Remember that this is now in the past and guilt will not bring the dead person back to you.

Guilt may result in *depression*. You may feel alone, naked, unprotected. There could be a sickening feeling of going down, down, down. You may feel overwhelmed and drained. “Nothing matters anymore. Nothing. Life will never be worth living...Am I going crazy?” Of course not. But what did you expect? To fill the void immediately? To go on living as before? Give yourself time...time to be hurt, to grieve, to cry, to scream, to “be crazy”.

Finally...

Your emotions will become less intense, less overwhelming and more hopeful. As you are ready, you will begin to re-invest your energy in the outside world and will start to feel like a “normal” human being again.