



WHAT WE NEED DURING GRIEF

TIME: Time alone; and time with others whom you trust and who will listen when you need to talk. Months and sometimes years of time to feel and understand the feelings that go along with loss.

CARING: Try to allow yourself to accept the expressions of caring from others even though they may be uneasy and awkward. Helping a friend or relative also suffering the same loss may bring a feeling of closeness with that person.

SECURITY: Try to reduce or find help for financial or other stresses in your life. Allow yourself to be close to those you trust. Getting back into a routine helps. Do things at your own pace.

PERMISSION TO BACK-SLIDE: Sometimes after a period of feeling good, we find ourselves back in the old feelings of extreme sadness, despair, or anger. This is the nature of grief, up and down, and it may happen over and over for a time. It happens because, as humans, we cannot take in all of the pain and the meaning of death at once. So we let it in a little at a time.

REST, RELAXATION, EXERCISE, NOURISHMENT, DIVERSION: You may need extra amounts of things you needed before. Hot baths, afternoon naps, a trip, a project or “cause” to work for to help others – any of these may give you a lift. Grief is an emotionally and physically exhausting process. You need to replenish yourself. Follow what feels healing to you and what connects you to the people you love.

HOPE: You may find hope and comfort from those who have experienced a similar loss. Knowing what helped them and realizing that they have recovered and that time does help, may give you hope that sometime in the future your grief will be less raw and painful.

SMALL PLEASURES: Do not underestimate the healing effects of small pleasures. Sunsets, a walk in the woods, a favorite food – all are small steps toward regaining your pleasure in life itself.

GOALS: For awhile it will seem that much of life is without meaning. At times like these, small goals are helpful. Something to look forward to, like playing tennis with a friend next week, a movie tomorrow night, a trip next month helps you get through the time in the immediate future. Living one day at a time is a rule of thumb. At first, don't be surprised if your enjoyment of these things isn't the same – this is normal. As time passes, you may want to work on longer range goals to give some structure and direction to your life; guidance or counseling can be helpful.

Understanding Grief

Grief, with its many ups and downs, lasts far longer than society in general recognizes. **Be patient with yourself.**

Each person's **grief is individual.** You and your family will experience it and cope with it differently.

Crying is an acceptable and healthy expression of grief and releases built-up tension for the bereaved person. Cry freely as you feel the need.

Physical reactions to the death of a loved one may include loss of appetite or over-eating, sleeplessness, and sexual difficulties. The bereaved may find that s/he has very little energy and cannot concentrate. A balanced diet, rest, and moderate exercise are especially important for you at this time.

Avoid the use of drugs and alcohol. Medication should be taken sparingly and only under the supervision of your physician. Many substances are addictive and can lead to a chemical dependence. In addition, they may stop or delay the necessary grieving process.

Friends and relatives may be uncomfortable around you. They want to ease your pain, but do not know how. Take the initiative and help them learn how to be supportive to you. Talk about your loved one so they know this is appropriate.

Whenever possible, **put off major decisions** (changing job, residence, etc.) for at least a year. This allows for more rational and less emotional decision making.

The bereaved may feel s/he has nothing to live for and may think about a **release from this intense pain.** Be assured that many bereaved persons feel this way, but that a sense of purpose and meaning does return. **The pain does lessen.**

Guilt, real or imagined, is a normal part of grief. It surfaces in thought and feelings of "if only". In order to resolve this guilt, learn to express and share these feelings, and learn to forgive yourself.

Anger is another common reaction to loss. Anger, like guilt, needs expression and sharing in a healthy and acceptable manner.

Children are often the forgotten grievers within a family. They are experiencing many of the same emotions you are, so share thoughts and tears with them. Though it is a painful time, be sure they feel loved and included.

Holidays and anniversaries of your loved one's birth and death can be a stressful time. Consider the feelings of the entire family in planning how to spend the day. Allow time and space for your own emotional needs.

A loved one's death often causes the bereaved to challenge and examine his **faith and philosophy** of life. Don't be disturbed if you are questioning old beliefs. Talk about it. For many, faith offers help to accept the unacceptable.

It helps to become **involved** with a group of persons having similar experiences; **sharing** eases loneliness and promotes the **expression** of your grief in an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding.



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Appropriate Expectations You Can Have For Yourself In Grief

- ❖ Your grief will take longer than most people think.
- ❖ Your grief will take more energy than you would have ever imagined.
- ❖ Your grief will involve many changes and be continually developing.
- ❖ Your grief will show itself in all spheres of your life.
- ❖ Your grief will depend on how you perceive the loss.
- ❖ You will grieve for all the things the death represented, both symbolic and tangible.
- ❖ Your grief will involve a wide variety of feelings and reactions.
- ❖ The loss will resurrect old issues, feelings and unresolved conflicts from the past.
- ❖ You may experience some identity confusion.
- ❖ You may experience a combination of anger and depression.
- ❖ You may have a lack of self-concern.
- ❖ You may experience grief bursts (bursts of grief that may occur with no warning).
- ❖ You may have trouble thinking and making decisions.
- ❖ You may feel like you are going crazy.

AFTER MY LOSS

I need to talk about my loss.
I may often need to tell you what happened –
 or ask you why it happened.
Each time I discuss my loss I am helping myself
 face the reality of the death of my loved one.

I need to know that you care about me.
I need to feel your touch, your hugs.
I need you just to be with me.
 (and I need to be with you.)
I need for you to believe in me and in my
 ability to get through this grief in my own way.
 (and in my own time.)

Please don't judge me now –
 or think that I'm behaving strangely.
Remember I'm grieving. I may even be in shock.
 I may feel afraid. I may feel deep rage.
 I may even feel guilty. But above all, I hurt.
I am experiencing a pain unlike any I've ever felt before.

Don't be concerned if you think I'm getting better
 and then suddenly I seem to slip backward.
Grief makes me behave this way at times.
And please don't tell me you "know just how I feel",
 or that it's time for me to get on with my life.
 (I am probably already saying this to myself.)
What I need now is time to grieve and recover.

Most of all, thank you for being my friend.
 Thank you for your patience. Thank you for your caring.
 Thank you for your helping, for understanding.
 Thank you for praying for me.
And remember, in the days or years ahead,
 After your loss – when you need me
 As I have needed you – I will understand.
And then I will come and be with you

Barbara LesStrang
Afterloss, A recovery companion for those who are grieving.

The Grieving Person's Bill of Rights

Though you should reach out to others as you do the work of mourning, you should not feel obligated to accept the unhelpful responses you may receive from some people. You are the one who is grieving, and as such, you have certain "rights" no one should try to take away from you.

The following list is intended both to empower you and to heal and to decide how others can and cannot help. This is not to discourage you from reaching out to others for help, but rather to assist you in distinguishing useful responses from hurtful ones.

1. ***You have the right to experience your own unique grief.***
No one else will grieve in exactly the same way you do. So, when you turn to others for help, don't allow them to tell you what you should or should not be feeling.
2. ***You have the right to talk about your grief.***
Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk as much as you want, as often as you want, about your grief.
3. ***You have the right to feel a multitude of emotions.***
Confusion, disorientation, fear, guilt and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey. Others may try to tell you that feeling angry, for example, is wrong. Don't take these judgmental responses to heart. Instead, find listeners who will accept your feelings without conditions.
4. ***You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits.***
Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel ready to do.
5. ***You have the right to experience grief "attacks".***
Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but it is normal and natural. Find someone who understands and will let you talk it out.

6. ***You have the right to make use of ritual.***
The funeral ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. More importantly, the funeral is a way for you to mourn. If others tell you that rituals such as these are silly or unnecessary, don't listen.
7. ***You have the right to embrace your spirituality.***
If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you feel angry at God, find someone to talk with who won't be critical of your feelings of hurt and abandonment.
8. ***You have the right to search for meaning.***
You may find yourself asking, "Why did he or she die? Why this way? Why now?" Some of your questions may have answers, but some may not. And watch out for the clichéd responses some people may give you. Comments like, "It was God's will" or "Think of what you have to be thankful for" are not helpful and you do not have to accept them.
9. ***You have a right to treasure your memories.***
Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. You will always remember. Instead of ignoring your memories, find others with whom you can share them.
10. ***You have the right to move toward your grief and heal.***
Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly. Remember, grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you must forget that the death of someone loved changes your life forever.

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Death and Grief: Supporting Children and Youth

Death and loss within a school community can affect anyone, particularly children and adolescents. Whether the death of a classmate, family member or staff member, students may need support in coping with their grief. Reactions will vary depending on the circumstances of the death and how well-known the deceased is both to individual students and to the school community at-large. Students who have lost a family member or someone close to them will need particular attention. It is important for adults to understand the reactions they may observe and to be able to identify children or adolescents who require support. Parents, teachers, and other caregivers should also understand how their own grief reactions and responses to a loss may impact the experience of a child.

GRIEF REACTIONS

There is no right or wrong way to react to a loss. No two individuals will react in exactly the same way. Grief reactions among children and adolescents are influenced by their developmental level, personal characteristics, mental health, family and cultural influences, and previous exposure to crisis, death, and loss. However, some general trends exist that can help adults understand typical and atypical reactions of bereaved children. Sadness, confusion, and anxiety are among the most common grief responses and are likely to occur for children of all ages.

The Grief Process

Although grief does not follow a specified pattern, there are common stages that children and adolescents may experience with varying sequencing and intensity. The general stages of the grief process are:

- Denial (unwillingness to discuss the loss)
- Anger or guilt (blaming others for the loss)
- Sorrow or depression (loss of energy, appetite, or interest in activities)
- Bargaining (attempts to regain control by making promises or changes in one's life)
- Acceptance or admission (acceptance that loss is final, real, significant, and painful)

Grief Reactions of Concern

The above behaviors are expected and natural reactions to a loss. However, the following behaviors may warrant further attention:

Middle and high school levels:

- Flashbacks
- Emotional numbing or depression
- Nightmares
- Avoidance or withdrawal
- Peer relationship problems
- Substance abuse or other high-risk behavior

Signs that Additional Help Is Needed

Adults should be particularly alert to any of the following as indicators that trained mental health professionals should be consulted for intervention and possible referral:

- Severe loss of interest in daily activities (e.g., extracurricular activities and friends)
- Disruption in ability to eat or sleep
- School refusal
- Fear of being alone
- Repeated wish to join the deceased
- Severe drop in school achievement
- Suicidal references or behavior

Risk Factors for Increased Reactions

Some students (and adults) may be a greater risk for grief reactions that require professional intervention. This includes individuals who:

- Were very close to the person(s) who died
- Were present when the person died
- Have suffered a recent loss
- Have experienced a traumatic event
- Are isolated or lack a personal support network
- Suffer from depression, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, or other mental illness

Keep in mind that groups, particularly adolescents, can experience collective or even vicarious grief. Students may feel grief, anxiety or stress because they see classmates who were directly affected by a loss, even if they didn't personally know the deceased. Additional risk factors include the deceased being popular or well-known, extensive media coverage, a sudden or traumatic death, homicides or suicides.

SUPPORTING GRIEVING CHILDREN AND YOUTH

How adults in a family or school community grieve following a loss will influence how children and youth grieve. When adults are able to talk about the loss, express their feelings, and provide support for children and youth in the aftermath of a loss, they are better able to develop healthy coping strategies. Adults are encouraged to:

- Observe youth's physical and emotional reactions.
- Listen patiently. Remember that each person is unique and will grieve in his or her own way.
- Be prepared that children need to discuss the loss repeatedly. Children should be encouraged to talk about, act out or express through writing or art, the details of the loss as well as their feelings about it, about the deceased person, and about other changes that have occurred in their lives as a result of the loss.
- Help children understand the death and intervene to correct false perceptions about the cause of the event, ensuring that they do not blame themselves or others for the situation.
- Provide a model of healthy mourning by being open about your own feelings of sadness and grief, as comfortable.
- Create structure and routine for children so they experience predictability and stability.
- Take care of yourself so you can assist the children and adolescents in your care. Prolonged, intense grieving or unhealthy grief reactions (such as substance abuse) will inhibit your ability to provide adequate support.

TIPS FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS WITH GRIEVING FRIENDS AND CLASSMATES

Seeing a friend try to cope with a loss may scare or upset children who have had little or no experience with death and grieving. Some suggestions teachers and parents can provide to children and youth to deal with this “secondary” loss:

- Seeing their classmates’ reactions to loss may bring about some fears of losing their own parents or siblings. Children need reassurance from caretakers and teachers that their own families are safe. For children who have experienced their own loss (previous death of a parent, grandparent, sibling), observing the grief of a friend can bring back painful memories. These children are at greater risk for developing more serious stress reactions and should be given extra support as needed.
- Children (and many adults) need help in communicating condolence or comfort messages. Provide children with age-appropriate guidance for supporting their peers. Help them decide what to say (e.g., “Steve, I am so sorry about your father. I know you will miss him very much. Let me know if I can help you with your paper route...”) and what to expect (see “expressions of grief” above).
- Help children anticipate some changes in friends’ behavior. It is important that children understand that their grieving friends may act differently, may withdraw from their friends for a while, might seem angry or very sad, etc., but that does not mean a lasting change in their relationship.
- Explain to the children that their “regular” friendship may be an important source of support for friends and classmates. Even normal social activities such as inviting a friend over to play, going to the park, playing sports, watching a movie, or a trip to the mall may offer a much needed distraction and sense of connection and normalcy.
- Children need to have some options for providing support; it will help them deal with their fears and concerns if they have some concrete actions that they can take to help. Suggest making cards, drawings, helping with chores or homework, etc. Older teens might offer to help the family with some shopping, cleaning, errands, etc., or with babysitting for younger children.
- Encourage children who are worried about a friend to talk to a caring adult. This can help alleviate their own concern or potential sense of responsibility for making their friend feel better. Children may also share important information about a friend who is at risk for more serious grief reactions.
- Parents and teachers need to be alert to children in their care who may be reacting to a friend’s loss of a loved one. These children will need some extra support to help them deal with the sense of frustration and helplessness that many people are feeling at this time.

Adapted from “Death and Grief in the Family: Tips for Parent” in *Helping Children at Home and School III*, NASP, 2010 and from materials posted on the NASP website after September 11, 2001.

Local Traumatic Loss Resource Guide

- Newton Medical Center's Center for Behavioral Health 973-383-0973
- Karen Ann Quinlan Hospice (they offer support groups for children/teens/adults and can most likely offer additional resources.)
- There are a variety of private counselors in Sussex County and parents should check with their insurance carriers as to who is covered on their policy.

Additional Resources

- <http://www.2ndfloor.org/>=(teen friendly helpline providing supports and resources)
- School Based Youth Services Program=out-patient mental health program located on-site at Sussex Tech. Resources and support available to Sussex Tech students and their families only