

What Everyone Should Know About Grief

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Loss can be a life-changing experience. Major losses, such as health, relationships, or the death of a loved one, have a ripple effect that impacts many or all aspects of one's life and sense of identity. The changes that ensue with loss are often irrevocable, forcing adjustments and adaptations that are unwanted and painful. Inaccurate information or unrealistic expectations about grief can interfere with the healing process, adding to the bereaved individual's distress. Whether you yourself are facing a loss, or you are trying to support a grieving friend or family member *it may help you to know...*

- **Grief is a natural response to loss** and a normal consequence of our ability to love, connect, and live fully. We do not grieve that which isn't important to us.
- **Grief is experienced at multiple levels.** It affects us physically as well as emotionally and spiritually and impacts our thinking and behavior.
- **There is no one right way to grieve.** Knowing that there are wide variations in what is "normal" can help. Response to loss is highly individual, based on personality, life experience, personal beliefs and expectations, as well as other factors unique to the individual and their relationship with whom or what is lost. Everyone grieves in their own way. Some will cry openly and easily, others may long for tears that do not seem to come, and yet others will feel a need to control emotional expression in front of others. Being able to share and explore personal experiences and feelings about the loss with others can be very necessary and helpful for some people. Others may be more comfortable finding private ways of acknowledging the impact of the loss. Some find it more helpful to explore how to cope with the painful feelings and ways to adapt to the changes that accompany loss.
- **Grief can be exhausting.** The energy that grief requires takes its toll in fatigue, irritability, and restlessness. Forgetfulness and concentration difficulties are not uncommon. Attention to the basics of self-care—health, nutrition, rest, and exercise- facilitates the healing process.
- **Fluctuation in feelings, energy and coping is to be expected.** The ups and downs are often unpredictable and are a normal part of the grief experience. Grieving people often feel and behave like they are on an emotional "roller coaster". A good day is often followed by a day filled with painful challenges and reminders.
- **There is no timetable for grief.** It takes as long as it takes. While the intense pain that often accompanies acute grief may be expected to abate over time, there will always be times when the loss is remembered, missed and grieved.
- **Grief impacts not only the individuals directly involved, but also their social connections and support system.** Relationships are changed after loss, and it is normal to reassess, change or even end some relationships.
- **Grieving people sometimes need to look outside their usual support system to find the understanding and information they need** relationships. Caring friends and family members often feel awkward and uncertain about how best to offer support and comfort. One of the consequences of a culturally diverse society is the lack of common mourning rituals where roles and behaviors are defined and universally recognized. Grief or other support groups, books, Internet resources, and professional counseling can be of benefit.

If you or someone you care about is faced with loss, the *Pathways of Hope* grief counseling center at Hospice of Dayton may be able to help. Staffed by professionally licensed and trained counselors and social workers, Pathways of Hope offers grief information, education and support as well as group and individual bereavement counseling services to anyone in the community impacted by loss. Services are offered without charge due to the generosity of community donors like you.

