

Grief Notes

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Facing the Emotions of Grief

by George McLaughlin, Bereavement Coordinator

Whether you have experienced a recent death or one that occurred months ago, you are on your grief journey.

Due to this loss, our lives are turned upside down with a wide range of often intense emotions that may seem completely foreign and unexpected. Some last for just a moment while others may hang on for days. Some are hard to bear while others are easily managed. There may often be a combination of emotions that seem to conflict with one another, such as a feeling of sadness mixed with laughter or a sense of relief mixed with grief. Despite what we may expect or anticipate, grieving brings a variety of emotions to be recognized and managed along the path toward healing.

Understand that there is no “typical grief journey”. At the start you may experience a roller coaster of emotions with many ups and downs, twists, and turns, starts and stops. Often you may even feel as if you are going backwards, as the old saying goes, “one step forward and two steps back”. This unique journey you’re on will frequently be filled with questions, varying emotions, and changes you may have never expected

As you continue on your journey you may feel that you are making some sense or order of the chaos by finding and creating a rhythm and routine that works for you. This is good but you may find that thoughts and memories come to mind on special occasions and holidays, sparking the return of some challenging emotions. This, too, is normal. The more we allow our feelings to be expressed, the more we will heal and move off of the emotional roller coaster of grief. Remember we can love the one we lost forever, but to express that love we need not be in pain forever. This is where support from family, friends, neighbors, a spiritual community, grief counselor, support group or even a social group will be of invaluable help. Also remember that our Bereavement Coordinators are here to support you in a any way we can. Please contact us through the information provided if you would like to arrange a time to talk.

Commonly Experienced Emotions

Loneliness: Feelings of loneliness pull on our heartstrings, often making us feel lifeless and without purpose. We miss and long for the one we have lost. Loneliness and longing for the person or for the life that we had before their death is normal. However, at some point we must stop looking back at all we lost and begin to look forward to whatever lies ahead.

Guilt/ Regret: Guilt is another common reaction after a loss. We want to rewrite the circumstances, as if our behavior could alter the devastating facts. These “if onlys...” keep us stuck in our grief. Looking back, we can always think of things that could have been done or said differently. Regret is part of our human nature, however we can learn from the past and try to live out what we’ve learned. Be gracious to yourself and others for perceived errors or omissions, especially when the loss is new and freshly felt.

Fear: This is a common emotion as we face an unknown future. Our world has changed completely. Everything that was part of our “normal” life is now changed. Things we depended on are no longer there and what we had planned now seems impossible. While we may not have much control over the future, having a good support system can often ease the fear of what lies ahead. Identify the people in your life that are truly able to walk with you through moments of uncertainty.

Anger: A very difficult emotion to face is anger. It is commonly directed at the one who is gone or at those we feel took them from us. Anger is natural when a loss or death occurs regardless of who or what makes us angry. When done appropriately, allowing and expressing anger can be healthy. Remaining endlessly angry is not healthy for anyone as it leads to bitterness and resentment. Instead, express any anger in a beneficial way, then let it go.