

About Bereavement

All of us experience the death of a loved one or friend at some point in our lives, and each of us is affected by that death. Our individual reactions may differ. After the death of a loved one or friend, a normal process of grieving takes place. Often grieving takes place in stages. Different emotions are experienced during the different stages of this process. The stages of grieving are different for each person. Some of the emotions that can be part of this grieving process are:

- **Shock**, which protects you from the impact of the death for a while.
- **Anger**, which may be experienced at being let down by the person who died or when you are looking for someone to blame for the death.
- **Depression**, or feelings of isolation or loneliness.
- **Guilt**, what didn't you do to save the person.
- **Denial**, a process of not allowing feelings to come to the surface.
- **Fear**, not understanding the grieving process.
- **Sadness**, an overwhelming sense of loss
- **Anxiety**, an inability to concentrate which can become so severe that one cannot function.
- **Relief**, because of the end of suffering the loved one has endured.
- **Longing**, a sense of wanting everything to return to what it had been.

Not everyone experiences the same feelings or stages, nor with the same intensity. There is no one "right way," no necessary order to stages, nor is there a correct time period for this process. Grieving may progress over a period of two years or even longer, depending on many individual factors, such as depth and length of relationship with the loved one or friend.

Some people may experience disbelief at hearing about the death of their loved one. They may believe that the person should have not died. They may have difficulty imagining life without that person. "They were too young." "They were too good." "They were too healthy." "I can't survive without him/her." All of these are common reactions.

Many people have a need for religious services and other rituals which promote the grieving process, provide social support, and allow a death to be validated. These rituals provide a time for family and friends to support each other and to say goodbye to the deceased person. Different cultural or religious traditions have different rituals. Examples of these rituals include holding a wake where the body is displayed or sitting *Shiva* in which the family is given comfort through home visitations by friends. Some

people display a picture of the deceased in their home, perhaps surrounded by candles and flowers. Other examples include holding a memorial service, writing a journal, visiting the grave site. All of these can help healing.

It is very beneficial to have support when experiencing a loss. A bereavement support group can share information of all kinds, from legal issues, to the simple knowledge that someone has the similar feelings, to a different perspective on your experience.

Individual counseling is also available. If you have experienced the loss of someone you love or of a friend, come to the Personal Counseling Program at 0203 James Hall. A counselor can help you to understand your feelings and reactions and the process of grieving. All services are free and confidential.

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