

GUIDE FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING **GRIEF**

Grief is a process of mental, emotional, physical, and social adjustment to the loss of a person who is an important part of our lives. Grief is inevitably painful. The amount of suffering, the length of time of suffering, and the ways we experience and express the loss may vary depending upon the individual. The length of time, however, may involve many months. That doesn't mean that we will be hurting all the time or as intensely as we do at the beginning. We progress through a series of **STAGES**, emotions, or different reactions to the loss. The order may be different from person to person, and we may re-experience each emotion time and again. Over time the intensity and duration of these emotions subsides.

SHOCK -- Usually the first emotion we experience is shock, numbness, or a "spaced out" feeling. We may be less responsive to what goes on around us, but we can still function to carry on our daily activities.

DENIAL -- Although intellectually we may accept the fact of the person's death, emotionally we may be unable to do so, and behavioral patterns such as making room for the person in our schedule continues.

ANGER -- Anger, hostility, and resentment toward the deceased and ourselves, toward others whom we feel are to blame, and toward God are common feelings of grieving persons. We may feel angry with the person for taking her life and leaving us without her friendship. We may feel angry with her friends and family for "letting this happen" although nobody can predict or prevent this from happening sometimes. We may be angry with God for allowing this to happen or with ourselves for not doing more. These are all common feelings, and they need to be expressed, sorted out, and accepted for what they are.

GUILT -- In any death, but more so in the case of suicide, survivors will feel guilty that they could have done something to prevent it from happening. Others may reinforce this by trying to find fault or place the blame. In the final analysis, we can not control the behavior of another person.

DEPRESSION -- Then the bottom may drop out and we may feel hopeless, helpless, emptiness, and despair. Lack of energy, appetite, or interest in previously pleasurable activities trouble us. Along with this we may feel lonely, isolated.

HOPE -- Eventually we recover and start to feel more "normal" again. We begin to have hope again that life will be rewarding and fulfilling, and that we can always remember our friend, but without the intense pain that we feel at the time of loss.

WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOURSELF AND OTHERS IN TIMES OF GRIEF

1. Accept the fact that you have experienced a traumatic event and you deserve time to cry. Don't fly into activity and feel you have to immediately get on with life as usual. Men, especially, because of our upbringing, need to realize that crying can be healthy. Men, don't try to be strong all the time.
2. Talk about the loss, what it means to you. Talk about the deceased and the good and bad times you shared. Find someone who has experienced a similar sorrow and share your feelings and thoughts with each other. Talking speeds the recovery.
3. Stay busy with purposeful work and recreation, but avoid frantic activity.
4. Take care of yourself. Bereavement can be a time of lowered resistance to disease. Eat right. Get enough sleep. Get some exercise.
5. Do something to alleviate excessive guilt. You did the best you could with the information and understanding you had at the time. It is only in hindsight that it seems so clear. If guilt is not responding to your best efforts, seek the help of a counselor or your pastor. Try not to place the blame on anyone else.
6. It is good to be with friends that share your sorrow. If you find after a while that they don't want to talk about the death any more, join a support group for people who are grieving.
7. When with friends that don't share your loss, try to put them at ease by saying that they don't have to say anything, but only listen. Don't avoid the subject of the death, however.
8. Postpone major decisions for a while, if you can.
9. Record your thoughts in a journal. It helps you get them out.
10. Try to help others. Focusing on others helps to lighten your load.
11. Take advantage of your religious affiliation, speak to your pastor, attend church, read the Bible verses having to do with death and sorrow.
12. If you or your family and friends think that your grief is becoming severe depression or that your grief continues for too long, seek the help of a counselor. Also, if at any time you consider suicide as viable option for yourself, please seek help. With help from a counselor, you can get past this despair, and see life from a whole new perspective.