



## **GRIEF: A NORMAL AND NATURAL RESPONSE TO LOSS**

Starting in childhood, many people have been taught to face life's crises with a "stiff upper lip," to "bear up and be strong." As we are influenced by these messages, we may become fearful that any show of emotion, particularly tears, might be interpreted by others as a sign of weakness:

One of the tragedies in our society today is that many bereaved family members and friends experience their grief alone, feeling that there must be something wrong with them and that certainly no one they know of has ever felt or behaved in these strange ways. Fearful of embarrassment or of appearing "crazy" to others, many bereaved persons hide their true feelings of grief.

**It is important for you to realize that what you are experiencing is a normal, natural, and expected response to the loss of a significant person in your life.**

Your grief reaction may manifest itself in any one or more of the following ways, as described by other bereaved persons.

**Physical** reactions may include disruptions to eating and sleeping. Other physical reactions may include weakness, pounding and/or heavy feeling in the chest, shortness of breath.

*I feel sick to my stomach. I just can't eat! I have trouble getting to sleep and, after I finally do, I only sleep for a few hours before I'm up again.*

**Mental** manifestations may include lack of initiative, forgetfulness, tension, and anxiety:

*If only I had told him/her one more time, 'I love you.' She/He should have gone to the doctor months ago. The nights and weekends are the worst for me – empty and lonely. It's as if anytime now she'll/ he'll call or come walking through the door. I keep thinking of things to tell him/her.*

*I can't seem to get organized. I'm up and down a hundred times during the day – here and there – never accomplishing anything. I keep thinking about how it all happened – over and over again in my mind. I guess I'm trying to make some sense out of it all.*

*I think I'm losing my mind. I can't concentrate on anything. I can't even decide what to wear today. Yesterday, I heard my loved one call for me in the night, and today I thought I saw him rocking in his chair.*

**Emotional** reactions may include feelings of relief, anguish, depression, unexpected and uncontrolled crying. There can be a tendency to respond to others with anger, irritability, or a loss of spontaneity.

*I thought this would bring us closer together; instead we constantly bicker. When I'm feeling up, he's depressed, and when he's up, I'm down.*

**Spiritual** reactions can be anger with God or doubts about the reality of God's existence:

*If my faith were stronger, I would be able to handle this. If I really believed, this wouldn't have happened.*

Whenever you feel the need to talk about your experience, please contact Bereavement Services at Hospicare.

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