

Common Questions from Someone Who is Grieving

1. How do I know I'm grieving in the right way?
2. Why do I feel so angry?
3. Am I depressed or grieving?
4. Why can't I just get some sleep?
5. Why do I feel so guilty?

1. How do I know I'm grieving in the right way?

No one can tell you how to grieve. Grieve in your own way. It is so difficult to say goodbye. There is no normal time span during which healing takes place. Accept your emotions. Death brings so many reactions in widely contrasting combinations. Allow yourself to feel these normal emotions:

- **Denial:** This is a self protection mechanism that sometimes occurs after a loss. It is so hard to realize that in your lifetime you will never again see or touch your loved one.
- **Anger:** Anger and resentment is a normal reaction to loss and sometimes the most difficult emotion to handle. Some of us have been taught that anger is a 'wrong' feeling but anger expressed will promote a realistic picture of your loved one.
- **Guilt:** Unfinished guilt interferes with the mourner's ability to adjust to the loss. Sharing the guilt with another in a supportive, non-judgmental environment will increase the mourner's ability to live with it.
- **Tears:** For some, tears are the best therapy for emotional strain, for men as well as women and children. Weeping is a natural way to ease anguish and release pain. Everyone needs some kind of outlet to discharge pent-up emotions.

Share your feelings with others. It is not enough to recognize your conflicting emotions, you must deal with them openly. An emotion that is denied expression is not destroyed. You only prolong the agony and delay the grief process. Find a good listener, someone who will understand that your feelings are normal responses to your bitter grief.

Recall the unforgettable memories. Sometimes bereaved individuals feel the solution to the grief is to attempt to "forget". However, it is good to recall the life of the deceased. By recognizing the wealth of the past, you can better understand why you are grieving.

2. Why do I feel so angry?

It is important to acknowledge the anger and to find ways to deal with it constructively. Anger is often a misunderstood emotion and cultural expectations teach us to keep it

'bottled up'. Acknowledging that we are angry is a first step toward healing; here are some other suggestions:

- It helps to deal with anger physically – take a walk, the longer and faster the better...go for a bike ride...use an exercise bike...work out at an exercise/aerobic club...scrub floors by hand...wash walls...tear up old magazines.
- Imagine whomever or whatever you're angry at being on the other end of your blows – hang a tire in a tree and hit it with a baseball bat...beat boxes with a broom...hit a bed with a tennis racquet...pound nails...throw rocks into a lake or field.
- Write about your anger...in a journal or even in letters that you tear up.
- Crying releases anger and frustration. Do things which force the tears, such as listening to special music, looking at photos, visiting the cemetery, doing things that remind you of your loved one.
- Talking will help you to understand the specific cause of your anger. You often feel better after getting it out.
- Deep breathing, medication, even counting to 100 help muscles to relax and resolves the physical component of your anger.
- Become aware of the dangers and limitations of "inner directed" anger and "displaced" anger. Be careful of uninhibited expressions of rage. They may make you angrier and do harm, which is self-defeating. It is important to release your anger in safe ways. Set limits so that no one is hurt.
- Consider counseling if your anger and/or depression continues.

3. Am I depressed or grieving?

The effects of grief and depression appear similar. In both, people may experience disturbances in sleep patterns, eating patterns and often feelings of profound sadness. It is important to acknowledge that depression is a treatable illness and to be open to accepting help. See a physician or a mental health professional for a checkup and discussion of symptoms. Other helpful steps you can take are:

- Talk things over with an understanding friend or loved one. Talk is one factor that may help a person not to become severely depressed.
- Redirect energy in more constructive channels so there is more pleasure in one's life. Pleasure is a source of energy. Take a break for a favorite activity, an evening out, a trip, etc.

- Get some exercise (walk, tennis, aerobics) to help work off bottled-up tension, relax, and to sleep better. Practice deep breathing which stimulates physical energy.
- Become involved with people, volunteer work, and help other people.
- Avoid extra stress or big changes if possible.
- Remember that good nutrition is important for mental and physical health. Seek professional help if depression is severe or persistent. Depression can be debilitating if ignored or suffered alone.

4. Why can't I just get some sleep?

Many people experience periods of insomnia after a death. The stress of bereavement often makes our thoughts race, making it difficult to fall asleep. Some suggestions to aid sleep are:

- Try not to become overly upset about not sleeping as this just perpetuates your inability to sleep. Have confidence that eventually you will sleep again.
- Go to bed and get up about the same time every day, including weekends. A regular routine keeps your inner clock set. Sleep in a comfortable bed in a dark, quiet room.
- Don't try to force sleep. If you cannot fall asleep after 30 minutes, get up and do something unexciting or peaceful, like knitting or reading. Then go back to bed. Repeat this as necessary.
- Take time to unwind. Do not go to bed after a flurry of activity, either physical or mental (like balancing your checkbook). Take a warm bath and/or drink warm milk before going to bed.
- Read light books so the last thing you're thinking about is the book instead of your grief and other worries. Don't watch television in bed. Even dull, boring shows may keep you awake.
- Avoid soft drinks, coffee, tea (hot or cold), cocoa, chocolate, or medicines which contain caffeine!
- Be aware that sleeping pills, alcohol and cigarettes may even cause insomnia. Alcohol or sleeping pills may aid us to go to sleep, but as soon as they are out of our systems we wake up. We build up a tolerance and then require a higher dosage to promote sleep. Barbiturates can cause death when taken with alcohol.

- Try not to spend daytime hours in your bedroom. Reserve that room for sleeping at night. Do not nap during the day. Avoid heavy meals before retiring.
- The hum of an air conditioner or special bedside machines that produce soft noises may induce sleep.

5. Why do I feel so guilty?

Realize that guilt is a normal part of grief. If you do feel guilty, it is helpful to admit it – to yourself – to others who will listen and care. Some other helpful suggestions are:

- There is so much that we tried to do. There are things we did not do. Accepting our imperfections aids us in working out our guilt.
- Ask yourself what things specifically are bothering you the most. Remember there is not always an answer to “why” and you do not have to find somebody (yourself) or something to blame.
- Remember the special times that you had with your loved one who has died.
- Talk over your feelings of guilt with a trusted friend or professional.
- Realize that sometimes you are powerless and that you can’t control everything that happens.
- If guilt is hindering your recovery, seek professional counseling. Try not to be afraid or embarrassed to talk about your feelings of guilt with those who have been trained to help.