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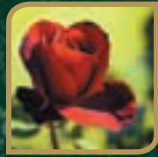
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Coping with Grief

INFORMATION FOR BEREAVED FAMILIES



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Information for Bereaved Families

Individuals differ in the way they react to the death of a loved one and in how they display their grief.

Remember that there is no right or wrong way in dealing with your grief as it is a very personal and individual experience.

Grief can impact on your body, emotions, thoughts and behaviours.



Physical Reactions

The phrase '*having a broken heart*' recognises that grief impacts on our physical health.

Physical reactions could include:

- increased susceptibility to minor illnesses (eg colds, viruses),
- lack of energy, feeling tired and run down,
- palpitations,
- sore or tense muscles or a feeling of weakness in the muscles,
- stomach upsets, diarrhoea, constipation or other gastrointestinal problems,
- headaches,
- shortness of breath, may be accompanied by pain in the chest,
- disrupted sleep or appetite.

It is important to check any physical signs of ill health with your doctor.

Emotions

When someone important to you has died you will often have strong feelings which may initially be overwhelming.

Some of these feelings may include:

- hurt,
- sadness,
- shock,
- guilt,
- anger,
- anxiety,
- loneliness,
- sense of unreality,
- confusion,
- numbness,
- emptiness,
- devastation,
- helplessness
- yearning or pining,
- relief,
- depression.

Whatever feelings you have it is important to recognise them as valid and normal for you at this time.



Physical Reactions

Thoughts

The mind is capable of creating powerful sensations and images. Your thoughts may be focused on the deceased person and your changed circumstances for some time.

Some common thought reactions could include:

- forgetting things easily or having difficulty taking in new information,
- becoming easily confused,
- preoccupation with the person who has died,
- mind going blank,
- mind racing out of control,
- trouble concentrating,
- sense of the deceased person's presence – 'seeing or hearing' the person who has died,
- dreaming of the deceased person.



Behaviours

When people are grieving they often display changes in behaviour.

These may include:

- becoming more quiet and withdrawn,
- wanting to talk about the deceased as often as possible,
- seeking out reminders of the deceased,
- avoiding reminders of the person who has died,
- losing interest in regular activities,
- crying,
- losing patience easily,
- restless overactivity or total inactivity,
- increased use of alcohol / drugs,
- voicing thoughts or wishes about being dead,
- not eating or overeating.

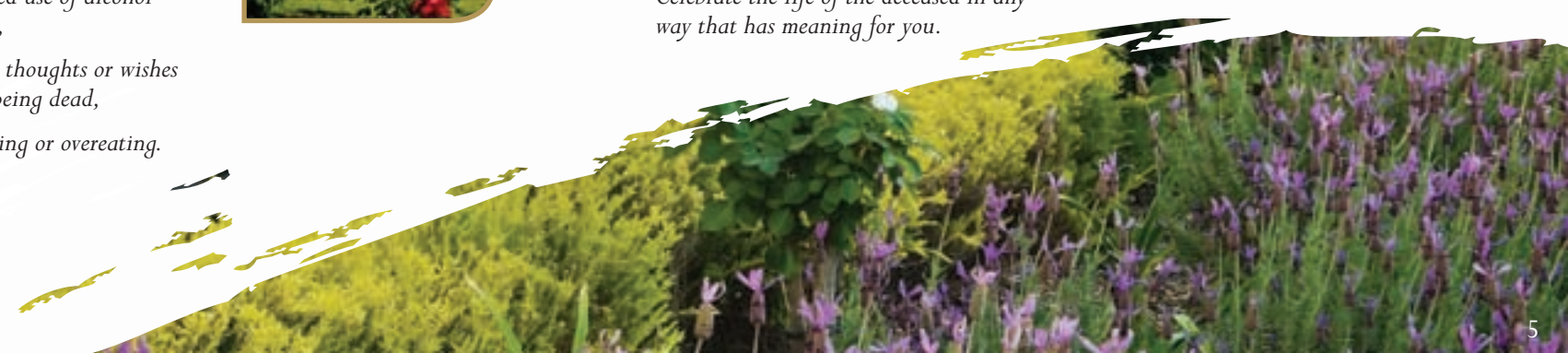


What Can Help You at This Time

There are many things you can do to help yourself at this time.

Some suggestions follow:

- Find a good listener who will listen non-critically, even when you want to go over the same information time and again.
- Look after yourself. Pay special care to diet, sleep and exercise.
- Give yourself time to go through the grief process. Don't expect too much too soon. Set your own pace – do not allow others (no matter how well meaning) to dictate your grief.
- Make sure you have some time on your own.
- Ask for what you need from family and friends. Sometimes others do not know what to say or do and hence keep their distance, or inadvertently make an insensitive remark. Tell them what helps you.
- Talk about the deceased person. Use their name. They were and still are an important part of your life.
- Celebrate the life of the deceased in any way that has meaning for you.
- Acknowledge that there will be ups and downs in your grieving process. Some days will be better than others.
- Remember the deceased as the person they really were. This means that it's okay to remember some of their weaknesses and annoying habits as well as their strengths and endearing qualities. It helps the grieving process to remember the real person, rather than a fantasy.
- Anticipate that certain 'anniversary' dates are likely to trigger strong feelings and reactions. These dates could include a birthday, anniversary, graduation, Christmas, Mother's Day or Father's Day. In addition there could be other significant dates connected with the death or mourning activities which can intensify grief reactions. Experiencing reactions at these times is normal. Over time the intensity of these reactions is likely to lessen.





More Complicated Circumstances

There are times when the death of someone will elicit more complex reactions and other difficulties. For example, when someone dies as a result of suicide, the family can often feel isolated as suicide is still considered a taboo by many in our society. This is often further complicated by the fact that there may be lots of feelings of hurt, confusion and anger by those who are left behind.

Being an estranged partner to the deceased also tends to put you outside the safety net of open social support. You may have been divorced, or perhaps living in a hostile or even violent relationship with the deceased, but this does not mean that you will not have a reaction to the death.

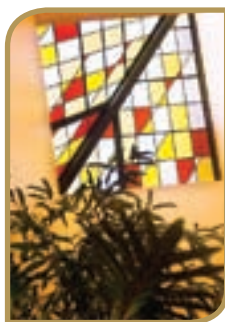
Grieving in such instances is often more complex. Remember you have a right to react and to express your feelings about your loss. Seek help and support, talk about what you feel and ask for what you need.

Practical Arrangements

After a death there are a lot of practical arrangements that need to be made. These will focus on two major areas; organising the burial or cremation of the deceased and organising family affairs or everyday matters.

Your funeral director or religious organisation can advise and assist you in caring for the deceased. They will help you with all of the formalities and documentation required. These arrangements will be made soon after the death and you may be confused or in shock. Also seek support from family or friends at this time.

In the longer term, often continuing many months after the death, there are other everyday practical issues. These include dealing with the will, finances, Centrelink and other official bodies, filling in forms and lodging documentation. If you do not feel able to deal with these issues, again seek help from family or friends. There are also professional people in the community who specialise in providing assistance (eg financial adviser, bank manager).



Seeking Help Outside of Family and Friends

It can often help to talk to someone outside your network of family and friends. Professional people can sometimes provide alternative perspectives, act as an impartial sounding board or help you make plans for your future.

Some possibilities for extra assistance include:

- *Your local doctor,*
- *A counsellor, social worker or psychologist,*
- *Your local community health centre,*
- *Your religious association / community.*

In addition there are many useful books available on coming to terms with your loss. Your local library will have books on loss and grief or alternatively check your local book store.

