

GRIEF

Definition: "The normal emotional response to loss which may include a complex range of painful feelings such as sadness, anger, helplessness, guilt and despair." ⁱ

Australian research has identified that having the opportunity to express grief is important in promoting adjustment, although more commonly socially, the expression of grief is inhibited by others rather than facilitated.

"For patients and their families, emotional distress, anxiety and depression may increase as the disease increasingly impacts on daily life and they are confronted with their own, or their loved one's mortality. Recognition of grief and the provision of psychological support and bereavement support are integral aspects of care." ⁱⁱ

People grieve by expressing their feelings. The following are specific ways to help yourself through grief.

'GRIEF IS EXHAUSTING AND IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONTINUE YOUR DAILY HEALTH ROUTINES'

Basic Health Concerns:

- Try to eat regular, nourishing meals. If this is difficult, try 4-5 smaller ones, and keep nourishing food to snack on.
- Rest is important - try to develop regular bedtime routines.
- Continue your exercise program and develop a manageable routine.
- Meditation, perhaps in the form of prayer or yoga, can help you get the rest you need.
- Make sure your doctor knows what has happened so they can help monitor your health.

'GRIEF DOES NOT HAVE TO BE AS ISOLATING AS IT SEEMS'

Outside Support:

- Look for a support group; lecture; seminar that pertains to your situation.
- Continue attending church services, if that has been a source of strength for you.
- Let your friends and other family members know what your emotional or physical needs are. The more they know what to do to help you, the more available they will be.

Feelings:

- Read books/articles on the process of grief, so you can identify what you are feeling and have some ideas on how to help yourself.
- Allow your feelings to be expressed appropriately..
- Crying is good. You feel lighter after you've had a good cry.

This information is designed to assist victims and their families, but by no means should be relied on as medical advice. Victims of asbestos related diseases should consult their doctors for medical advice and also to ensure the 'above' is applicable in their specific circumstances.

Consider sharing your tears with other loved ones. We laugh together, why not cry together as well?

- Keeping a journal is a good way to identify feelings, and also to see progress.
- Celebrate birthdays, anniversaries- they may need special planning and are impossible to ignore.

Be Kind to Yourself:

- If you desire some time alone, take it as often as you need to.
- Look for small ways to pamper yourself,
- A short trip can be a good break from grief, but be aware that on return, the pain of grief will be waiting for you. However, you will have had a 'break' from usual routines; a change; a rest, and the knowledge that you can enjoy some things in life again.
- Learn to have patience with yourself. Remember, grief takes time.

Help For Your Marriage and Relationships:

- Good communication is necessary. People cannot read your mind. They may not know that this particular day is difficult or they may not know how to help you.
- Talk about what is helpful to you and what is not.
- Be sensitive to the needs of your partner- grief is different for each person.
- By reviewing past losses together, you can understand how your partner may react to the recent one.
- Avoid competition about who is hurting most. Each person will have difficult issues to cope with. Grief is hard for everybody.
- Try not to expect too much from your partner. People do not operate at 100% during the grieving period. The dishes may not get done or the yard may not be mown as regularly as before. Many chores can wait. Hire someone to help you catch up.
- Read and educate yourself about the grief process. Read the ones in which you think the author is 'speaking to you'. Grief books do not need to be read cover to cover.
- Consider the gender differences - men and women grieve differently. Usually, women are more comfortable expressing their emotions. Men will often get busy burying themselves at work or taking on projects at home.
- Avoid pressuring your partner about decisions that can wait.

Some decisions cannot be postponed, however, many can be put off for a day or week, or longer.

ⁱ Raphael B. The anatomy of bereavement: a handbook for the caring professions. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984

ⁱⁱ Kissane Ow, Bloch S, McKenzie M, McDowall AC, Nitzan R.

Family grief therapy: a preliminary account of a new model to promote healthy family functioning during palliative care and bereavement. Psycho-Oncology 1998; 7: 14-25.