Grieving Takes Time

First and foremost, grief is a natural, normal response to the loss of something important to us.

Feelings of grief are different for each person and take time to pass. The feelings may be so intense that you feel like you’re out of control and can’t stop crying. On the other hand you may feel empty and numb. You might find it difficult to eat and have trouble sleeping at night. Grief can cause physical changes as well, such as headaches, stomach aches or getting colds easily. Some people may not feel anything right away, but days after a loss begin to feel grief symptoms. There is no ‘right’ way to react because everybody deals with loss differently.

As time passes, the feelings of grief won’t be there all the time and they’ll be less intense. But reminders of your loss and situations that would have involved both of you may make you feel the loss more strongly. Special occasions and / or anniversaries of times when the person was around, can be really painful. Many people find loss hard to accept. It takes some people longer than others to adjust.

The feelings that come with grief, such as difficulty controlling emotions and moods, and feeling teary and tired, can be similar to depression. Grief can also be a trigger for depression. Emotions can be so intense that sometimes it is difficult to know whether you’re feeling down because of the grief or whether you have symptoms of depression. A simple difference between the two is that feelings of grief come and go and change in intensity, while depression affects you nearly all the time.

Suggestions for managing loss and grief

It can be helpful to:

- Allow yourself to cry – letting your feelings out can bring some relief
- Take time out – if you need to be alone sometimes that’s okay
- Let yourself smile – it’s okay to enjoy your memories and your life
- Say goodbye – letting go is part of the grieving process
- Avoid bottling things up – keeping feelings to yourself may build tension inside you
- Be gentle with yourself – give yourself time to recover
- Talk to someone – sharing your feelings with someone you trust can help
- Stay healthy – eat well and stay physically active.

It’s not helpful to:

- Use alcohol or drugs to dull your emotions or pain
- Act out your frustration with risky behavior (eg reckless driving)
- Take out your anger on others
- Experiment casually with sex to get close to someone
- Hide your feelings to protect someone else.
**Working through grief**

It can feel like there’s nothing you can do to work through your grief. But there are some practical things to help you on the journey.

Keeping a diary of your feelings and memories can give some relief and also show you how your feelings of grief have changed over time. It can also help to write a letter to the person to say goodbye – include what you did together and what you really valued in your relationship. If you don’t feel like writing, you could keep a book in which you draw pictures or other visual reminders of your time together.

Some people find it helps to have a ‘grief period’ every day, when they spend time alone thinking, reflecting, crying, praying, meditating, writing or drawing. On the other hand, it’s a good idea to take some time out from grieving too, for example by listening to music or going to the movies, playing sport or reading.

The process of grieving can seem long and lonely, so it can help to find someone you can talk to about your feelings – a friend or relative, or you may prefer to talk to another teacher, counselor or doctor.

**When is it over?**

It’s impossible to predict how long it will take someone to overcome grief. Feelings come and go, and it can feel like you’re always taking one step forward and two steps back. For most people time is the best healer, and it may take weeks or months before you can start to accept the changes in your life.

Feeling better is a sign that you’re working through your grief and adjusting to life without the person you lost – it doesn’t mean that you’re forgetting them or letting them down.

If you continue to feel down, it may be that other things are affecting your mood. If you feel sad or miserable most of the time and have lost interest in things you used to enjoy, you may be experiencing depression and need to get some additional help.

**Key points to remember**

Losing a loved one or a special person in your life is a stressful experience. Most people pass through the period of grief but some continue to feel unhappy for a long time. Sometimes people develop a Major Depressive Episode after losing someone. You may be experiencing Major Depression if **for more than two weeks you:**

- have felt sad, down or miserable or irritable **most of the time**
- have lost interest or enjoyment in nearly **all** of your usual activities.

You might also be:
- not doing so well at work or school
- experiencing changes in your relationships with family and friends.

If this applies and you also have four or more of the following symptoms, you may have developed depression.

- Lost or gained lots of weight
- Restless, agitated or slowed down
- Lost a lot of energy and feel tired all the time
- Find it difficult to concentrate or make up your mind
- Feel worthless or guilty
- Feel that life is not worth living.

If this is happening to you, you can talk to your family doctor and / or call The Personal Counseling Center at x5968 or Birkam Health Center at X2614. These feelings are unlikely to go away on their own.

Resources: