

# Loss in the First Year & Beyond

## *When your loss has just happened*

## First Things to Know About Grief

Grief is a long process, full of ups and downs. The grief process takes longer than is generally recognized by society, so be patient with yourself. There is no grief like one's own grief. Each person's grief is individual and no two people will grieve exactly alike. If you feel like crying, then cry. It is a healthy and acceptable way to express grief and release tension. To bottle up your emotions is to do yourself harm.

Friends and relatives may feel uncomfortable around you. They want to help you in some way but don't know how to go about it, what to say, or what to do. Help them be supportive to you: be open and honest about your needs and feelings. Talk about your loved one so they know it is appropriate for them to do so, too. If possible, put off major decisions for at least a year.

Physical reactions to the death of a loved one may include loss of appetite, overeating, sexual difficulties, sleeplessness, chest pain, stomach pain, headaches and loss of energy. Maintain a balanced diet and get plenty of rest and exercise. Avoid the use of drugs or alcohol. Many substances can become addictive and in addition, may anesthetize a person against the pain of the loss. This may stop or delay the grieving process.

Take time to decide what to do with your loved one's belongings and don't allow someone to make these decisions for you. This does not have to be done immediately and you can do it a little bit at a time as you are ready. You may become so depressed that you feel you have nothing to live for or you may wish to join your loved one in order to escape the pain you are feeling. This is not abnormal and many people feel this way. Be aware that the clouds do clear and you will, once again, have meaning and purpose in your life.

Guilt real or imagined is a normal part of grief. It is expressed in such thoughts as 'if only I would have' or 'I should have,' etc. To resolve guilt feelings it's important to express them and forgive ourselves for the things we feel guilty about. Unresolved guilt makes one feel miserable and can hold up the grieving process. It is normal to feel angry about your loss. It is normal to find someone to blame. You may find yourself very volatile and resentful. It is important to share your angry feelings in an acceptable manner.

Children have been called the 'forgotten mourners.' If you have grieving children in your family, don't forget them. Share your feelings and tears with them as this will allow them to feel included and part of the grieving process.

Holidays and anniversaries of your beloved's birth, death, marriage, etc., are difficult times. Give some thought ahead of time to how you will spend the day. Often, it is helpful to do something special with special friends. The death of your beloved may cause you to take a look at your philosophy of life, to question God, re-evaluate old beliefs, change goals. This is normal.

You will never be 'your old self' again, for you are not the same person you were before but you can find new meaning in life and move ahead.

## Overcoming Firsts

Since your loved one died, every day may be a challenge. Special days or “firsts” can be an even bigger challenge. You may question how you can survive each first, the first anniversary, the first mother’s day or the first birthday without your loved one present. The anticipation of these days may be worse than the day itself. The year of overcoming firsts may be a time of many emotions as you walk through your journey through grief. You may experience intense feelings of grief unexpectedly and often.

As you enter the year of firsts, please know:

- Each first is a new experience. Each event or party will not be the same without your loved one. You may feel out of sorts experiencing things for the first time and it may be difficult to celebrate. It is perfectly normal. Be kind to yourself.
- Each first can contribute to your grief reaction. It may seem that things are feeling normal and suddenly the smallest thing can trigger a tearful response. Plan for the waves of grief and be patient with yourself as you wander forward in this uncharted territory.
- Each first is an opportunity to honor your loved one. Many people who are grieving face the task of trying to develop new traditions. Look for ways to honor their life like telling stories or do something they would have enjoyed.
- Each first is an opportunity to honor yourself. We must find a way to redefine our day-to-day routine and to reconstruct meaning for ourselves. We need to learn to accept who we are in the context of life after loss. Learning this may be one of the most difficult adjustments a person will ever have to make.

Allow yourself to feel the pain of your grief as it approaches. Explore options of new routines and traditions. Life can go on. It will never be the same and it may not look like the plan you had intended. The good news is you only experience “a first” once!

## Quotes for Reflection

“Grief is not a disorder, a disease or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical and spiritual necessity.

The price you pay for love.  
The only cure for grief is to grieve”  
-Earl Grollman

“Grief is like the ocean; it comes on waves ebbing and flowing. Sometimes the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim”

-Vicki Harrison

It’s okay.

It’s okay to miss them

It’s okay to say their name.

It’s okay to cry.

It’s okay to laugh.

It’s okay to smile when you think of them.

It’s okay to breathe deeply.

It’s okay to function.

It’s okay to have days where you can’t function.

It’s okay to be angry.

It’s okay to be thankful.

It’s okay to love again. It’s okay to remember.

It’s okay to hope.

It’s okay to be honest.

It’s okay to trust again.

It’s okay.

It’s okay.

It’s okay.

There are no quick fixes to grief. No easy answers. Every expression of grief that wants to be felt and honored and given its space, must be allowed...  
in order to heal.

-Tom Zuba

## Let the Healing Begin: Support Groups and Recovering From the Loss of a Loved One

Many people have mixed feelings about coming to a Grief Support Group. A former group member, Liz Burton, shares her feelings below:

I found my husband dead of a heart attack on a Monday morning. Only someone who has gone through an ordeal like this can understand the incredible pain. The despair of the first weeks seemed never-ending. The sadness, the loneliness, the fear, and the anger...almost daily I would cry out, "Why did you take him from me?"

The flood of sympathy cards brought with them an invitation to attend a grief support group, "Why not", I thought, "I do need help badly." I cried all the way to the first meeting, angry at my husband for making me have to go to a group like this. "What can they possibly do for my pain?"

To my surprise, I got to the meeting all by myself. When I entered the room, I saw other people who, like me, must be in grief, however, I was convinced none of them hurt inside as much as I did. When the meeting started, we were to introduce ourselves and the circumstances of our loss. When my turn came I froze. No one laughed. The lady next to me put her hand over mine and said, "We understand." The man next to me told his story and wept. This is what a support group is all about. You can let out those feelings, you can cry, you can be angry and everyone understands. When I felt stronger, I told my story. I was able to let go of my frustrations, express my fears and to cry. It felt good. A warm sense of security swept over me. I was glad I came. I belonged here. I needed to be here at this point. I needed these people's support, advice and guidance. In the group, we talked about our new relationships with our children and friends. We talked about how to cope with an empty house. We asked ourselves, will we ever feel good again? Slowly I got used to being 'single'.

Going into my 9<sup>th</sup> month of grief I do feel changes coming on. I am healing. My sense of humor has returned. I need people now more than ever. There are still problems in my new life, of course, such as; when should I let go of my wedding band? It's silly perhaps. I don't know the answers. I just keep doing the things that feel best for me and one of them is attending my support group.

## Child Grief Program

Our Child Grief Program is a support center for children and families whose lives have been changed by death. This program **does not replace counseling**, but is a program that provides emotional support while working through the natural grieving process. Our mission is to teach healthy coping skills to children and their families and provide a secure environment where they can safely express feelings of grief and loss, thus facilitating the process of healing. The Children's Program addresses issues directly related to death and dying. The topics are presented in ways that are appropriate for each age group. Supportive services include: Early Grief (Preparing for the death of a loved one), Individual Grief Counseling sessions, Grief Groups and other supportive services.

The Children's Program support groups are peer groups, because children and adults have differing abilities to understand and express feelings of loss. Our children's groups consist of a sharing time and a time for play activities. The language of play helps young children to express their emotions and feelings. While children meet in their support groups, parents gather to share their own concerns and feelings. Trained grief counselors facilitate all groups. The program's facilitators support and encourage the adults by providing information about how children grieve and how parents can help their children and each other through the painful process.

If you would like more information or would like to schedule an intake, please call 321-264-1687 or email [childgrief@reflectionspsc.org](mailto:childgrief@reflectionspsc.org) Subject line, Child Grief Referral.

St. Francis  
**REFLECTIONS**<sup>SM</sup>  
North Star for Children

## St. Francis Reflections Grief Support Program

St. Francis Reflections Lifestage Care supports and assists those who are grieving as they process through their grief and healing period. We are committed to providing a comprehensive program available to any Brevard County resident in need of grief support.

Our program offers a variety of services listed below:

- \* Individual and/or family grief support
- \* Spiritual support and pastoral counseling
  - \* Grief support groups
- \* Grief support information and literature
  - \* Community resource information

## How to Contact St. Francis Reflections Grief Support

To learn more about the Grief Support Program and current monthly schedule of group meetings, social events, and memorial events, please contact the grief coordinators at 321-269-4240.

