

# Loss in the First Year & Beyond

## *What to expect in normal grief*

### Your Grief Will:

- Take longer than most people think.
- Take more energy than you would have ever imagined.
- Involve many changes and be continually developing
- Show it's self in all spheres of your life- psychological, social, and physical.
- Depend on how you perceive the loss.
- Entail mourning not only for the person, but for the hopes and dreams you held for and with that person, and for the needs that will go unmet because of the death.
- Involve a wide variety of feelings and reactions such as depression and sadness.

### You Will:

- Grieve for many things, both symbolic and tangible-not just the death alone.
- Grieve for what you have lost now and what you have lost for the future.
- The loss will resurrect old issues, feelings, and unresolved conflicts from the past.

### You May:

- Feel some anger and depression such as irritability, frustration, annoyance, and intolerance; even at those trying to help.
- Feel anger and guilt or at least some manifestation of these emotions.
- Have some identity confusion as a result of the major loss and the fact that you are experiencing reactions that may be quite different for you.
- Have a lack of self-esteem and a lack of self-concern.
- Experience grief spasms-acute upsurges of grief that occur suddenly with no warning.
- Have trouble thinking-memory, organization, and decision making.
- You may feel like you are going crazy.
- Be obsessed with death and preoccupied with the deceased.
- Find yourself acting socially in ways that are different than before.
- Begin a search for meaning and may question your religion and philosophy of life.

## Grief Misconceptions

Starting in childhood many people have been taught to face life's crises with a "still upper lip" to 'bear up and be strong.' As we are influenced by these subconscious messages, we may become fearful that any show of emotion, particularly tears, might be interpreted by others as a sign of weakness (e.g...He's falling apart,' or she's going to pieces.')

One of the tragedies in our society today is that many bereaved family members and friends experience their grief alone, feeling, 'There must be something wrong with me. Certainly no one I know ever felt or behaved in these strange ways.' Fearful of embarrassment or of appearing 'crazy' to others, many bereaved persons hide their true feelings of grief.

It is important for you to realize that what you are experiencing is a normal, natural and expected response to the loss of a significant person in your life.



## Common Grief Reactions

Your grief reaction may manifest itself in any one of the following ways described by other bereaved persons:

*"I feel sick to my stomach. I just can't eat."*

*"I have trouble getting to sleep and after I finally do I only sleep for a few hours before I'm up again."*

Other Physical reactions include weakness, pounding and/or heavy feeling in the chest and/or shortness of breath."

*"I can't seem to get organized. I'm up and down a hundred times during the day-here and there never accomplishing anything."*

*"I keep thinking about how it all happened-over and over again in my mind. I guess I'm trying to make sense out of it all."*

*"I think I'm losing my mind. I can't concentrate on anything. I can't even decide what to wear today."*

Other mental manifestations include a lack of initiative, forgetfulness and anxiety. Other emotional reactions include feelings of relief, anguish, depression and/or unexpected and uncontrolled crying.

*"I thought this would bring us closer together, instead we constantly bicker."*

*"When I'm feeling up he's depressed: when he's up, I'm down."*

Other social reactions include a tendency to respond to others with anger or irritability and/or a loss of spontaneity.

*"If my faith were stronger, I would be able to handle this."*

*"If I really believed, this wouldn't have happened."*

Other Spiritual reactions include anger with God and/or doubts about God's existence.

## Truths That You Should Note

- Special dates, events, and stimuli will bring upsurges in grief. This is normal. Society will have unrealistic expectations about your mourning and may respond inappropriately to you.
- Friends may avoid you because they are unsure of how to respond to you. Give them a chance. Tell them what you need because they do not know. Your grief will bring an intense amount of emotion. It will surprise you and those around you. Most of us are unprepared for the response we have to a major loss.
- Don't be afraid. Many people fear the 'letting go' of emotions and crying will mean that they are unable to stop or gain control again. This does not happen. People cry as much as they need to, and tears are healing! Unexpressed grief can damage your physical and emotional health.

## 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

St. Francis Reflections Lifestage Care also offers North Star, a specialized program for grieving children, teens, and their families. Through play and talk with each other, the children have the power to help themselves heal and help each other in the healing process.

## How to Contact St. Francis Reflections Grief Support

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

To learn more about the Children's Grief Program for grieving children, please contact the Program Coordinator at 321-264-1687.

