



## WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER A LOSS OF A LOVED ONE

Each person's grief is unique and will follow its own time-table. We all respond differently to a loss. However, there are some general guidelines that can help us to understand where we or someone we love are in the healing process.

### **First 48 hours after the death of a loved one:**

This is a time of shock. The shock may be intense and the emotions can be overwhelming and frightening. Denial may be very strong during the first few hours. You need someone to just sit with you, encourage you, and just be there with you. **Presence** is the most important thing during this time. Basic needs such as eating, sleeping, making decisions, may be hard for you at this time. Having someone to help take care of basic needs can be a gift during this time.

### **First week:**

Most actions are automatic – going through the motions. Things such as funeral planning, calling relatives, taking care of business take most of the time. This time may be followed by a time of emotional or physical exhaustion – especially if you have been a caregiver for your loved one up until the time of their death.

### **Second to Fifth Weeks:**

During this time you may feel abandoned by your family and friends. Most of them have returned to their normal routines and it is a time of trying to return to life. If you are trying to maintain a job, your employer may expect you to be recovered and fully functional at work. You will need to communicate your needs to them and realize that they really don't understand. You may feel like "It's not as bad as I thought it would be. I can handle this". This is still a time of denial. Denial helps to insulate us from the full impact of the loss.

### **Sixth to Twelfth weeks:**

It's during this time that the anesthetic of denial may completely wear off and the reality of the loss may hit full force. You may experience physical symptoms from the grief such as:

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| <i>Sleep changes</i>                                       | <i>muscle tremors</i>                      |
| <i>Unpredictable bouts of crying</i>                       | <i>loss of motivation</i>                  |
| <i>Onset of fear, sometimes paranoia</i>                   | <i>extreme mood swings</i>                 |
| <i>Wanting to punish something or someone for the pain</i> | <i>change in appetite</i>                  |
| <i>Anger</i>   | <i>desire for isolation</i>                |
| <i>Changes in sexual desire/activity</i>                   | <i>need to talk about the deceased</i>     |
| <i>Inability to concentrate or focus</i>                   | <i>other physical symptoms of distress</i> |
| <i>Fatigue and weakness</i>                                |  |

### **Third to Fourth Month:**

You will have cycles of good and bad days. Frustration and anger will usually appear easily. It is also during this time that your immune system may be hardest hit – with colds and other illnesses. You have to especially take care of your body during this time because the stress can cause you to be susceptible to illnesses

### **Six months:**

This can often be a very painful time, resurrecting all the events of the loss and starting the cycle of emotional upheaval all over again. This reaction of starting the cycle over all again can also be triggered by special holidays, birthdays and events.

### **Twelve Months:**

The first anniversary of the death can be the hardest day for all of the bereaved. It usually lasts three or four days. If the quality of grief work done during the year has been high, this may also be the beginning of resolution.

### **Eighteen to Twenty four months:**

This is the time that resolution most often occurs. The raw pain has healed and you are able to bear the pain of separation enough to proceed with your own life. It is a time of establishing a new identity apart from the person who died. There is an emotional letting go that occurs and you no longer use the death as a focal point around which all of the rest of life revolves.

