

The Grief You May Feel

A tragic event has occurred in your life. You have experienced the loss of someone close to you.

No words can take away the pain you now feel, but we hope the following information will be helpful. It is important to remember that grief is different for everyone; it can be quite complicated and diverse. There are no set timelines or stages that we must follow. You are unique and your grief experiences will be unique as well. There is no right way or wrong way to grieve, only your way. Although each of our journeys are different, there are common emotions associated with grief that we share.

- **Anger.** Anger is normal in most grief experiences, but especially so in an unexpected death. You may begin to feel resentment toward your loved one. “They left us” is a common feeling.
- **Anxiety.** You may fear that you or others you love will die too. You may feel that you will not be able to deal with everyday realities, such as work or caring for your family.
- **Confusion.** It may be hard for you to focus. Disconnected thoughts may race through your mind and it may be difficult to complete tasks.
- **Denial.** It is normal to experience a state of disbelief or numbness about a loss. We try to keep painful feelings at bay until we are ready to process them. When you are ready, acknowledge your feeling of loss and begin the healing process.
- **Depression.** With any sense of loss, we want to withdraw from life. Life seems to lack the spark it once had. Take time to feel the loss.
- **Guilt.** At times we direct our anger and blame toward ourselves. We are flooded with thoughts of “If only,” such as: “If only I had been there,” “If only I had been watching more closely,” or “If only I had died instead.” Often times these thoughts are not logical, but they are a part of our feelings.

- **Sadness.** Sadness comes in waves and we experience it over time. Your body, mind and spirit need time to work together to allow you to embrace the depth of your loss. You may feel tired or have trouble sleeping. Your body reacts to your loss as well. Be patient with yourself.
- **Shock.** You may feel dazed and stunned, especially because you are experiencing the unexpected and sudden death of your loved one. This feeling is nature’s way of protecting you from the overwhelming reality of what just happened.

During this difficult and trying time, the emotions listed above may cause you to display your feelings of sorrow in an emotional or physical way. For example:

Emotionally, you may experience:

- Forgetfulness
- Unexpected anger towards others, a deity or the deceased
- Unexpected tears, or you may cry easily
- Mood swings
- Discomfort when around other people
- Fear of being alone
- A sense of death being unreal or that it didn’t actually happen
- Thoughts that haunt you, such as “If only things had happened differently.”
- Fear of what will happen next
- A sense that you’re “going crazy,” when you are overwhelmed with the intensity of your feelings

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Physically, you may experience:

- Tightness in the throat or in the muscles
- Heaviness or pressure in the chest
- An inability to sleep
- Periods of nervousness or even panic
- A lack of desire to eat
- A desire to overeat
- Visual or auditory hallucinations of the loved one who has died
- Headaches or stomach/intestinal disorders
- A lack of energy
- An inability to concentrate

When someone you love dies, you must mourn if you are to heal. Individuals who do not work through their grief may display behaviors to avoid painful feelings, such as: overeating, overspending, acting out, lashing out or burying themselves in their work. When we do not acknowledge our grief, the grief can negatively affect the quality of our lives. Healing requires the support and understanding of those around you as you embrace the pain of your loss. In addition to the resources shared in this folder, please feel free to contact Family Services at the UW Health Organ Procurement Organization at (608) 890-7604.