

The Various Aspects of Grief

Emotional aspects of grief may go through many stages, levels and phases. One moment the parent may be feeling almost back to normal and the next moment feel deep levels of anguish and pain. These swings in emotion may last months or years. Be patient with yourself and allow yourself time. And understand, you and your spouse most likely may have different timelines in how the bereaving process will occur and how long it will last. Try to understand you are both suffering and be tolerant as to how the other may approach or handle their situation.

Common Emotions Experienced by Bereaved Parents

Guilt. Guilt, whether real or imagined, is normal. The feeling that if only something had been different, the child might have lived, is common. By learning to express and share this feeling with other bereaved parents, eventually you may forgive yourself, understanding that no one can foresee the future.

Despair. Despair and loneliness are common. Even when you are with a group of people, you may feel alone. Few people can understand how deeply a bereaved parent hurts unless they have been there. Anger. Anger often emerges, sometimes aimed at a person imagined to have caused the death, at others who cannot understand your feelings, at God, even at the very child who died. To be with the child even in death. A wish to join the child who died is natural.

After a Child's Death

Most parents feel they have nothing to live for and think of a way out of the pain. The pain does lessen. Be assured that a sense of purpose and meaning does return. In the meantime, allow yourself the opportunity to grieve. Priorities may change after the death of a child. Allow these changes as long as they are positive ones, but try to avoid the damaging ones such as turning to drugs or alcohol. If you need time off work, make arrangements to do so. The main thing we would like to express is to open up and express your feelings to caring persons, loved ones, counselors and groups, such as The Healing Place, in an effort to help lessen the pain and to move on.

Warning Signs that Grief May Have Become Problematic

There are times when grief can become problematic, and rather than a healing and growing experience, prolonged grief can lead to serious problems. Here are some signs that grief has become a problem and that the person may need some professional help from a grief support counselor or program. Each of these signs are elements of a healthy grieving process, except the intensity, elapsed time and degree of behavior are elevated above a level to where there is a risk to health, life, functioning or goal attainment.

- Minimal or total lack of emotional expression regarding the loss
 - Prolonged inability to recognize that the loss has occurred
 - Extreme reactions of grief, usually anger or guilt, that persist over time
 - Marked or gradual change in health status
 - Prolonged depression with tension, agitation, insomnia and feelings of worthlessness and self blame
 - Over-activity without a sense of loss
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Find Professional Help When Grief is Too Much

One of the biggest problems in getting help is the person that is grieving may not admit that they are in need of help. Many people feel inadequate or weak if they are unable to handle situations themselves. Asking for help when grief is complicated is not a sign of weakness. Instead, it is a sign of courage and strength. Remember, courage is not the lack of fear, but the willingness to act in it's presence.