

GRIEF: A Personal Journey

©Victoria Hospice Bereavement Program

THE GRIEF JOURNEY

WHEN A DEATH OCCURS...

Walking the Edges

In the beginning phase of grief, you come to accept the reality of the death. The loss and your grief are your primary experience at this time.

You may experience a sense of unreality. You may be shocked at the news of the death and feel bewildered or stunned. This may be a time when you need care and assistance with practical tasks.

You know intellectually that the death has occurred but may find that you have moments of denial when you think or feel as if it has not really happened. Denial is nature's way of giving you breaks from hard truths. You are able to take things in at your own pace. To know in your heart and in your experience that the person is gone takes time.

Numbness may allow you to do the things that are necessary, such as making arrangements for the funeral, informing others of the death, etc. People may interpret this as strength and coping and be surprised when you do express feelings of distress.

ADJUSTING TO LOSS...

Entering the Depths

The middle phase of grief may last for an extended time, with good days and bad days, episodes of intense grief and times when you

are feeling more like your usual self. Some people describe their grief as coming in waves. Others think of their good days as 'holidays from grief'. Your grief is a central focus in your life at this time.

This is the phase in which you are coming to terms with the meaning of this loss in your life. You may be reviewing your relationship with the person who died, throughout the time you knew each other. You will think about all the ups and downs, and may experience feelings of regret or guilt.

Your personal responses to the loss may include a range of emotions such as anger, depression, and loneliness. The intensity of these feelings can be unexpected and overwhelming. Your values, beliefs or faith may be challenged by the ways in which your world has changed. It is beneficial to find ways to express and sort through these responses. Talking to a trusted person, keeping a journal, working on albums or family histories, finding safe outlets for emotions, and attending to taking care of yourself are some positive ways to help yourself.

Emotional pain can bring physical distress. This pain is real, not imagined, as your body is reacting to your emotions. Heartache is a very real sensation. Chest pain is quite common among bereaved people. You may find that your normal patterns of eating and sleeping are altered. Any problems or worries should be checked with your doctor. Make sure that your doctor knows about your bereavement so that he or she can advise you appropriately.

This is a time when your social support network may be changing. People may expect you to feel better than you do. You may not find the support that you want. The company of other

bereaved people may be very comforting to you as they can understand much of your experience.

AS LIFE GOES ON...

Mending the Heart

At some point in your grief, you will be aware that your loss is becoming a part of your past experience. You may feel some pangs of guilt that your life is continuing to move forward. It is helpful at this time to review how far you have come since the death occurred and to recall your earlier experiences of grief.

The good days outnumber the bad days more and more. Mostly, you are able to remember things about the person with a sense of comfort. Your grief is not over, as there very likely will be times when you will intensely miss the person who died. These times may be related to significant life events which you would have shared with them.

It is important to be able to find meaningful ways to include the person who died as an important part of your life now. You need ways to remember and honour them and to talk about them in a natural and comfortable way.

This may be a time of personal integration when you re-evaluate your life and make significant personal choices that enhance the quality of your life. You may want to acknowledge the personal growth that has come as a result of surviving, and continuing to survive, this loss.

METAPHORS FOR GRIEF...

Both the labyrinth and a journey are used here as metaphors for grief. Grief may be compared to a journey, a road that we must travel between how things were and how they will be. The labyrinth is an ancient image of an interior journey that moves inward to central issues of meaning; it is an image of wholeness. The labyrinth journey is a metaphor for grief as there is only one way to go—forward. Despite the many twists and turns, even when the next part of the journey cannot be seen, the way is onward. There are no dead ends and wrong turnings. The way leads to the centre and then returns. Grief is also like any significant journey, for the traveler is changed by their experiences along the way and the once familiar world is different on the traveler's return.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF GRIEF...

Grief is the natural variety of responses that you experience when someone important to you dies. It affects you in many ways: socially, physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. The death of someone important upsets your relationships, your daily life, and your ideas about how the world works. Grief is the process by which you cope with the significance of this loss, begin to adjust to the changes in your life and make some order out of the chaos that has resulted from this death.

Each of you has particular strengths and coping mechanisms that have helped you to deal with other times of distress. You have a network of family, friends and acquaintances on which you count for help and support. Most

often these resources will be sufficient to sustain and encourage you through your grief.

Your experience of grief will be influenced by your personal, familial and cultural style and your relationship with the person who died. You may be aware that this current grief feels quite different from another grief that you have experienced. The effect and meaning of this loss is unique.

*May your journey lead you to the centre and back.
May you be blessed with companions on your journey.*

We have chosen the image of the labyrinth as a metaphor for the journey through grief. A labyrinth is not a maze as there are no dead ends and no wrong turnings. There is only one way—forward. So it is with grief. The only way through is forward, with many turns and going back and forth over what seems like the same territory. We journey to the centre of our grief, to the centre of ourselves, and then slowly return to re-enter the world.

Each person's experience on the journey of grief will be different. This is a reflection of our personal style, our relationship with the person who died, our internal and social resources, and our past history of coping. As you journey through your own grief process, there will likely be unexpected turns and insights.

GRIEF: A PERSONAL JOURNEY



How to Contact Us...

Office Hours are:

9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Monday to Friday.

Telephone: (250) 701-4242

Toll Free: 1 888 -701-4242

Fax: (250) 701-4243

Email:

cvhospice@cowichanvalleyhospice.org

www.cowichanvalleyhospice.org