

Grief in Caregiving

Written by Cheri Burcham and Ann Marie Marshall, University of Illinois Extension Educators, Family Life

Grief is universal, yet each person experiences it in her own way. Grief is a personal response, and there are no guidelines for how long, when, and in what way a person should grieve.

Behaviors and attitudes commonly found in grief are:

- Shock, numbness, and denial
- Disorganization and loss of control
- Anger, frustration, helplessness, fear, and hurt
- Guilt and regret
- Loneliness and isolation
- Sadness, yearning, and disbelief
- Fatigue
- Relief and emancipation

The way you express grief can be influenced by many factors, including:

- Your relationship with the care-receiver
- Past experience with grief
- Family support
- Family traditions
- Gender

Although grief is a natural response, it need not spiral out of control. Think of moving through grief rather than getting over it. Moving through grief leads to healing, while clinging to or running away from grief may only prolong the pain.

Working Through Grief

The following suggestions can be helpful in moving through grief.

- Allow yourself quiet time to think and reflect.
- Be open with your feelings and vent your emotions. Crying provides emotional release. It can be seen as a cleansing process and is often considered part of “grief work.”
- Find support and tell your story. Talk to someone about your feelings. Find someone who is sensitive, a good listener, nonjudgmental, trustworthy, and has time for you.
- If you cannot find the support you need from family or friends, seek help from other sources, such as clergy, counselors, or support group members.
- Say good bye symbolically to the person you knew before the loss.
- Be patient. Grief can be a long process. Events such as anniversaries and birthdays can open wounds that are healing.
- Exercise.

- Stay involved with meaningful activities.
- Write in a diary or journal, or write a letter to yourself.
- Praise yourself. You deserve it.
- Recognize your efforts.

Remember to use grief as a way to move on. As you confront your daily tasks, your memories will be of the person you lost, and you will think less of the void that is left in your life.