

PATHWAYS CENTER *for* GRIEF & LOSS

COMMON GRIEF RESPONSES . . . IN PERSONS WITH SERIOUS ILLNESS

Any time we lose someone or something important to us, we experience grief. Grief is all the thoughts and feelings we experience related to the loss. With a serious illness, we may grieve different losses ranging from physical limitations to hopes and dreams for the future. Though it is a natural process, it can sometimes feel quite overwhelming. The following are *normal, natural* responses that may be experienced:

- Intense sadness and crying at unexpected times
- Numbness, as though this is not really happening
- Increased irritability
- Lack of concentration; forgetfulness
- Difficulty sleeping – afraid of not waking up
- Anger at the circumstances of your illness
- Appetite changes – *not* related to the disease process
- Guilt or anger over things that did *or didn't* happen in relationships with family & friends
- Jealousy of others with good health
- Regret over personal behaviors or lifestyle choices
- Physical discomfort such as emptiness in your chest, lump in your throat, neck tension – *not* related to the disease process
- Exhaustion or feelings of fatigue – *not* related to the disease process
- Preoccupation with symptoms of your illness and changes in your body
- Denial of your diagnosis
- Withdrawal from others – strong desire to be alone
- Spiritual searching and questioning
- Lack of interest in previously enjoyed activities
- Shift from hope for a cure to hope for significant milestones or management of symptoms

(over)

Though a natural process, grief can be very unpredictable with some days feeling easier than others. These suggestions may help you cope with your feelings – one day at a time. Remember that everyone’s grief experience is unique so try not to compare yourself or your grief with others. Review the following suggestions. Do what works for *you*. Disregard what doesn’t work and add your own ideas.

SUGGESTIONS FOR COPING WITH LOSS

- Know and accept that your physical and emotional coping won’t be up to par.
- Take one day at a time –break the day into smaller pieces when feeling overwhelmed.
- Acknowledge emotions as they arise – allow yourself plenty of time for crying and plenty of time for talking.
- Remember that anger is a powerful emotion and needs to be released in healthy ways – *all* of your feelings are valid and need to be acknowledged and expressed.
- Be gentle with yourself – give up self-criticism.
- Keep a journal – writing is another form of expression.
- When you are feeling up to it, allow yourself to participate in activities that are fun or relaxing for you.
- Talk to a trusted friend or clergy person related to spiritual questions or concerns you may have.
- Recognize that there will be some days you feel like talking and others that you won’t. Honor your changing needs each day.