

PATHWAYS CENTER *for* GRIEF & LOSS

COMMON GRIEF RESPONSES . . . SUGGESTIONS FOR HEALING

We experience grief any time we are separated from someone or something that is important to us. Grief over the death of a loved one is as natural a response as breathing. Though it is a natural process, it can sometimes leave us feeling quite overwhelmed by many feelings. The following are *normal, natural* responses that you may experience:

- Intense sadness and crying at unexpected times
- Numbness, as though the death didn't really occur
- Increased irritability
- Lack of concentration – inability to follow through on routine tasks
- Difficulty sleeping – dreams of the deceased
- Anger at your loved one for leaving you
- Anger around the situation of the death
- Appetite changes – increased appetite or marked decrease in appetite resulting in weight changes
- Guilt or anger over things that happened *or didn't happen* in the relationship
- Sadness over lost hopes and dreams
- Sensing the presence of your loved one – through sight, sound, scent or taste
- Dramatic mood changes over the slightest things
- Physical discomfort such as emptiness in your chest, lump in your throat, neck tension
- Exhaustion or feelings of fatigue
- A strong desire to talk with your loved one

(over)

Though a natural process, grief can be very unpredictable. With no clear stages to mark your progress and no neat instructions to follow, your journey through grief can feel unlike anything you've experienced before. These suggestions may help you cope with your grief – one day at a time. Remember that everyone's grief experience is unique. Your relationship with your loved one is like no other, so don't compare your grief with others. In your own time, in your own way, you will move through your grief. Review the following ideas. Do what works *for you*. Disregard what doesn't work and add your own ideas.

SUGGESTIONS FOR HEALING FROM LOSS

- Know and accept that your functioning won't be up to par.
- Take one day at a time – the grief process unfolds, as it needs to if we don't try to control it.
- 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 – *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.
- Pamper yourself.
- Join a support group – call a hospice, church, mental health agency or counselor.
- Trust your own sense of timing – grief is a process, not an event.
- Exercise daily – get outdoors and breathe the fresh air.
- Participate in pleasantly distracting activities – gardening, movies, reading, television, and museums.
- Give yourself permission to have fun.