

WHAT I NEED TO KNOW . . . ABOUT GRIEF

WHAT IT IS

Grief is a necessary process that helps individuals adjust to a loss. Grief is not a sign of weakness or lack of faith. Grief is a normal reaction to the loss of someone who has been significant in your life.

Although everyone experiences grief, each person responds differently to the death of someone who has been important to them. There is no single process by which all people adjust to loss; nor is there a set time frame in which one must mourn.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

You may experience some of the following *physical symptoms* associated with normal grief:

- Heavy and repeated sighing
- An empty feeling in the stomach
- Loss of appetite
- Lack of muscle power
- Extreme tension and irritability
- Fatigue and insomnia
- Tearfulness

You may experience some of the following *emotional symptoms* associated with normal grief:

- A feeling of restlessness, inability to concentrate, indecision about what to do.
- Sensing the loved one's presence; for example, expecting the person to appear, hearing his or her voice, seeing his or her face.
- Frequent dreaming of the loved one.
- Experiencing an intense preoccupation with the life of the deceased; telling, retelling and remembering things about the loved one.
- Assuming the mannerisms or traits of the loved one.
- Feeling guilty or angry over things that happened in your relationship.
- Feeling angry with the loved one for dying.
- Experiencing mood changes over small things; crying at unexpected times.
- Feeling that the future has no purpose for you.

WHEN TO CALL VITAS

If you need someone to talk with about your feelings or practical needs relating to your loss.

If you are experiencing a symptom for which professional help is strongly recommended, such as:

- Frequent thoughts of suicide.
- Continued withdrawal, intense feeling of isolation, or prolonged periods of depression.
- Seeking relief through alcohol or drug abuse.
- Inability to function or feeling out of control for a prolonged period of time.

WHAT TO DO

- Reach out to persons and groups that can offer you support and help.
- Attend a VITAS Bereavement Support Group or Community group in your area. A listing for these groups can be obtained from VITAS.
- Attend VITAS Memorial Services when they are offered. You will receive information about the dates and locations of these events.
- Seek help through counseling with a therapist, minister, priest or rabbi.
- Remind yourself that everyone needs adequate time to grieve.
- See your physician if you're concerned about physical symptoms.
- Recall how you have coped with similar feelings in the past and build upon these strengths.
- Talk to someone you trust about your feelings.
- Utilize any spiritual beliefs that bring relief or comfort.
- Express yourself through art, poetry, music, journaling or gardening.
- Establish a set of little hopes and events to look forward to.
- Know that it's OK to become involved in a new relationships when you're ready.
- Create or continue using rituals designed to help in the work of grief; for example, writing a letter to the deceased or lighting a candle on his or her birthday.
- Read a book or listen to a tape to assist you in working through your grief.

Suggested titles, which may be available at a local book store, are:

How to survive the Loss of a Love by Melba Colgrove, Harold Bloomfield & Peter McWilliams

Good Grief by Granger Westberg

When Bad Things Happen to Good People by Rabbi Harold Kushner

Don't Take My Grief Away by Doug Manning

Understanding Grief: Helping Yourself Heal by Judy Tatelbaum

A Child's View of Grief (a guide for Caring Adults) by Alan Wolfelt

The Fall of Freddie the Leaf by Leo Buscaglia