

# Ten Things to Know About Grief

When you are grieving, it helps to know what to expect. Although your grief is unique to your relationship with the person who died, there are some common themes. Our staff and volunteers, and bereaved people identified 10 things as important in understanding your grief.

## 1. Global effect of loss

The death of someone close to you can be a life-changing event that affects all parts of your life. You may feel like your world has been shattered. The grief process is a journey between how things were and how they will be. It is a personal journey, like navigating a labyrinth.

## 2. Grief is a natural process

The grief you feel when someone important to you dies is the result of living and loving. It is part of your meaningful connections with others. Grief is a normal part of life and a natural response to loss. Info about the phases of grief can help you understand the responses that you are experiencing.

## 3. There are individual differences in grieving styles

How you grieve is a unique combination of your personality, your past history of loss, and the relationship that you had with the person who died. Each person will grieve in their own way and in their own time. To cope with their grief, some people will openly express their emotions while others will control their thoughts and emotions. Neither style is right or wrong; each can be an effective way through grief.

## 4. Children and grief

Children look to the important adults in their lives to learn how to grieve. They are sensitive to the moods and behaviour of the adults around them. Children will not talk about their thoughts and feelings of loss unless the adults do. Children are scared of what they do not know or understand, so simple info about death and grief is helpful to them. Show and tell them how you are feeling and what you do with your grief. This will help them to understand their feelings and how to express them.

## 5. Social connections and support

When you are grieving, you want and need support from others. Due to awkwardness or their own feelings of grief, some people may not be able to give the understanding and caring that you expect from them. All of the relationships in your life will change in some way after a major loss. It is normal to look at, change, or sometimes, end certain relationships. You may find that the company of other bereaved people is particularly comforting.

## 6. Experiences you might have in grief

When you are actively grieving, you can feel very different from your usual self. Your emotions, mind, and reactions may seem unreliable. It is possible that you are feeling intense pain and emotions that you have never felt before. This is a natural part of grief. For example, you may feel tired, forgetful and cranky as your attention and energy are directed toward your grief and adjusting to your loss.

## 7. Ups and downs in the grief process

As you journey along the path of grief, you will find that your feelings and responses change at different times and phases of the process. There will be unpredictable ups and downs that may be felt as waves of grief or as good days and bad days. It is important to understand and value the good days as breaks or rests in your journey.

## 8. Self-care and what helps

There are things that you can do to help yourself at this challenging time. Getting info about grief can help you to understand your responses. Be gentle and patient with yourself as you grieve. Do what you can to keep your usual routine for health and social contact. Support may come from a variety of sources: family, friends, bereavement groups, online social networks, etc. If you are worried about yourself and your grief, seek professional counselling.

## 9. Time for grief

Despite what you may hear about ‘getting over it’ or ‘the first year’, there are no timelines for grief; it takes as long as it takes. Often your grief journey is longer than you or other people expected. You may feel pressure to be better than you are ‘by now’. Know that this loss will continue to be part of your life. You will always have times when you think about, miss, and grieve for the person who died.

## 10. Grief as a spiritual journey of healing

The death of someone important to you brings changes to your life. Although nothing is the same, you must somehow go on and find meaning in the new path before you. As your journey continues, you may experience healing and personal growth as a result of your suffering and the lessons that you have learned about what you truly value.

This pamphlet is just a guide. If you have questions, please talk to your health care provider. We are here to help you.

Content from the Ten Things to Know About Grief brochure created by Victoria Hospice and modified with permission.

*Adapted with permission from: Victoria Hospice, BC  
Adapted by: NSHA Integrated Palliative Care Services  
Designed by: NSHA Library Services*