

# Grief: Practical Suggestions

## Grief is ...

- "as crazy as you can be without being locked up"
- "like being handicapped without a sticker"
- "I never expected it to be so physically painful"
- "a journey, not a temporary state"

If your loss is very recent, the following suggestions might help:

- Take care of yourself. In addition to getting plenty of rest, plenty of exercise, eating right, and drinking enough water ... Be VERY CAREFUL driving. For some reason, our cars (our "personal space") seem to just invite sad thoughts. But know that you are extremely vulnerable now, and when your mind is elsewhere, you are in jeopardy (as are the other drivers on the road with you). If possible, concentrate solely on driving safely and put all other thoughts on hold. When you buckle up, put "it" out of your mind until you reach your destination.

- Beware of alcohol and prescription drugs. It's easy to fall into a pattern of chemical abuse at this time.

- Surround yourself with people who are good for you, and avoid people who are likely to hurt your feelings or offend you. Some people are more gifted than others when it comes to giving comfort. Pat expressions of sympathy, cliches such as "he's better off", "it's God's will", "You're young, you'll marry again/have more children", "you must put this behind you", "I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL" ... actually hurt more than they help. Rather than expect everyone to know how to act, rather than to be angry or hurt if they don't, selectively screen the company you keep during this very sensitive time. Even if it means putting long-time friendships on the back burner for a while. You owe it to yourself.

- Be willing to make the first move. Remember all those people at the funeral who said "let me know if there's anything I can do?" they really did mean it ... but don't be surprised if the phone calls taper off and a time comes when you hear from almost no one. It's likely people will fail to contact you out of a wish to NOT INTRUDE, although you may be desperately needing the contact. Try to understand that this is the case, and be willing to make a call yourself ... and say "Hey, I really need to talk" or "I'd love to see you ... may I come by?"

- Don't let others call the shots when it comes to the course of your mourning. Each individual grieves differently; some quietly - some audibly. Some need to look at pictures and reminisce; others can't bear that type of activity for a long while. Some need to keep busy; some need to be alone. What do YOU need?
- Resist pressure from others to "get rid of" clothes or other possessions. If the presence of these things is not a problem to you, why rush? There's plenty of time (like forever) to take care of these details.
- Similarly, if making routine trips to the cemetery or crypt comforts you, do it. But don't fall into a routine which compels you to do something that is very painful for you.
- Grief is very much a roller coaster, with good days and bad days constantly intermingling. As shock wears off and the weeks/months go by, you may find you are feeling worse, not better. If this happens, don't be alarmed (many people say "I thought I must be crazy."). This pattern is very typical, but in time the good days will outnumber, by far, the bad. Keeping a journal or a notebook where you record your feelings as time goes by can really help you get an overview of the grief recovery process.
- The library and the bookstore hold literally hundreds of good books about all facets of bereavement. If you like to read, a lot of help is there.
- Tears are healthy! Cry freely and without shame. Sometimes, the best night's sleep follows a really good cry.
- Hang in there, and 'keep the faith.' Your life can be good again. Believe it!
- When the day comes that you feel better - consistently (as opposed to sporadically) - resist the temptation to feel guilty about feeling better! Grief recovery is to integrate the loss into your life, and to go on living.