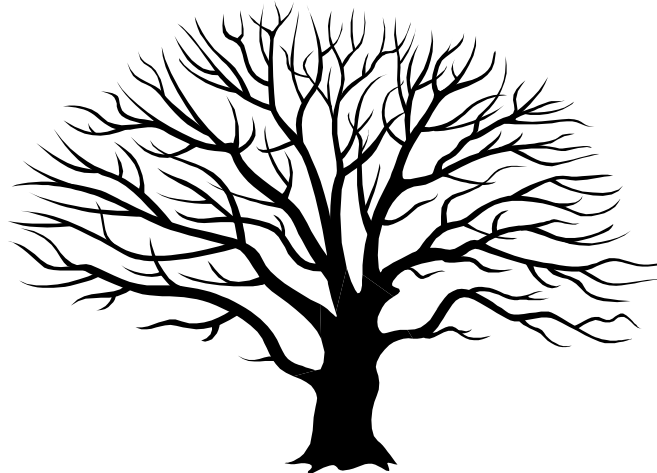


FALLING APART

by Eloise Cole

**I seem to be falling apart.
My attention span can be measured in seconds.
My patience in minutes
I cry at the drop of a hat.
I forget things constantly.
The morning toast burns daily.
I forget to sign the checks.
Half of everything in the house is misplaced.
Feelings of anxiety and restlessness are my constant companion.
Rainy days seem extra dreary.
Sunny days seem an outrage.
Other people's pain and frustration seem insignificant.
Laughing, happy people seem out of place in my world.
It has become routine to feel half-crazy.
I am normal I am told.
I am a newly grieving person.**

from THANATOS, Winter 1985



NORMAL AND HEALTHY RESPONSES TO GRIEF

Immediately following a death, there is a sense of shock, numbness and disbelief that can last minutes or weeks. The person may feel panicked or overwhelmed and experience strong physical reactions. When there has been a lengthy illness, the griever may experience a sense of relief for the person who died and for themselves now that the stresses of caregiving are over. This period allows the person to take information in at a slower rate and to prepare for the adjustments that lie ahead. Most people who suffer a loss, experience one or more of the following:

Social

- Withdrawal from others
- Dependence on others
- Fear of being alone

Physical

- Palpitations
- Shortness of breath, crying
- Diarrhea, constipation, vomiting
- Tightness in the chest or throat
- Change in appetite or sleep patterns
- Lack of energy; fatigue

Cognitive

- Confusion, sense of unreality
- Poor concentration, forgetfulness
- Denial, disbelief
- Constant thoughts about the person
- Dreams of the deceased

Spiritual

- Blaming God
- Lack of meaning or direction
- Loss of faith
- Wanting to die/join the dead person

Emotional

- Sadness
- Numb, empty, flat expression
- Guilt and self-reproach
- Anger and/or anxiety
- Indifference to daily activities

COMMON "GRIEF EXPRESSIONS"

- *"Why is this happening to me? What did I do to deserve this?"*
- *"If only I had told him/her one more time, I love you."*
- *"I think I'm losing my mind; I can't concentrate on anything."*
- *"The nights and weekends are the worst for me--empty and lonely."*
- *"If my faith were stronger, I would be able to handle this."*
- *"I have trouble getting to sleep, and after I finally do, I only sleep a few hours before I'm up again."*
- *"It's as if anytime now, he'll call or walk through the door. I keep thinking of things to tell him."*
- *"I hate you! Get out of here! Leave me alone."*

GRIEF--EXPECTATIONS YOU CAN HAVE FOR YOURSELF

You can expect that:

Your grief will take longer than most people think it should.

Your grief will take more energy than you can imagine

Your grief will involve continual changes.

Your grief will show itself in all spheres of your life and who you are. It will affect your social relationships, your health, thoughts, feelings, and spiritual beliefs.

Your grief will depend upon how you perceive the loss.

You will grieve for many things (both symbolic and tangible), not just the death itself.

You will grieve for what you have lost already as well as for the future--for the hopes, dreams and unfulfilled expectations you held for and with that person.

Your grief will involve a wide variety of feelings and reactions: some expected, some not.

This loss will resurrect old losses, feelings, and unfinished business from the past.

You may have some confusion about who you are; this is due to the intensity and unfamiliarity of the grieving experience and uncertainty about your new role in the world.

You may have a combination of anger and depression: irritability, frustration, and intolerance.

You may feel guilt in some form.

You may have a poor sense of self-worth.

You may experience spasms, waves, or acute upsurges of grief that occur without warning.

You will have trouble thinking and making decisions: poor memory and organization.

You may feel like you are going crazy.

You may be obsessed with the death or preoccupied with thoughts of the dead person.

You will search for meaning in your life and question your beliefs.

You may find yourself acting differently.

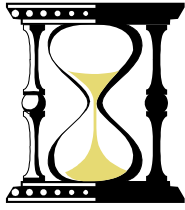
Society has unrealistic expectations about your mourning and may respond inappropriately.

You will have a number of physical reactions.

Certain dates, events, seasons, and reminders will bring upsurges in your grief.

Certain experiences later in life may resurrect intense grief feelings for you.

Reference: Therese A. Rando, Ph.D., [How To Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies](#)

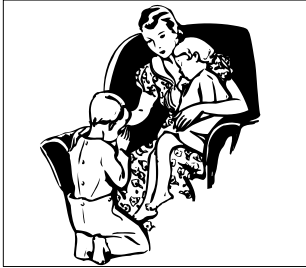


WHAT WE NEED DURING GRIEF

- TIME -** Time alone; and time with others whom you trust and who will listen when you need to talk. Months and years of time to feel and understand the feelings that go along with loss.
- REST -** RELAXATION - EXERCISE - NOURISHMENT - DIVERSION - You may need extra amounts of things you needed before. Grief is an exhausting process emotionally. You need to replenish yourself. Follow what feels healing to you and what connects you to the people and things you love.
- SECURITY -** Try to reduce or find help for financial or other stresses in your life. Allow yourself to be close to those you trust. Getting back into a routine helps. You may need to allow yourself to do things at your own pace.
- CARING -** You need acceptance and caring throughout the grief period. Try to allow yourself to accept the expressions of caring from others even though they may be uneasy and awkward. If you lack support, make finding it your first goal. Helping a friend or close relative also suffering the same loss may bring a feeling of closeness with that person.
- GOALS -** For a while, it will seem that much of life is without meaning. At times like these, small goals are helpful. Something to look forward to, like playing tennis with a friend next week, a movie tomorrow tonight, a trip next month helps you get through the time in the immediate future. Living one day at a time is a rule of thumb. At first, don't be surprised if your enjoyment of these things isn't the same. This is normal. As time passes you may need to work on some longer-range goals to give some structure and direction to your life. Involve yourself in a meaningful activity. You may need guidance or counseling to help with this.

SMALL PLEASURES -

Do not underestimate the healing effects of small pleasure, as you are ready. Sunsets, a walk in the woods, a favorite food - all are small steps toward regaining your pleasure in life itself. Don't be afraid to have fun -- laughter is good medicine.



CHILDREN AND GRIEF

When children experience the death of a loved one, they grieve just as adults do. They may not be able to verbalize their grief. They may repress their feelings or express them through their behavior. They may seem not to be affected. But they are grieving, often very deeply;

As parents, we often want to protect our children from the pain of grief. If we see ourselves having difficulty dealing with the death, we wonder how a young child could possibly cope with it. So we exclude children--we isolate them--we leave them on their own to answer their questions and to seek out the meaning of death. As a result, many children facing such a significant loss feel bewildered, abandoned, and all alone.

Here are some suggestions to help you with your child's grief:

(1) Allow the child to be angry - not destructive or violent, but to say, "I am angry! Acknowledge the anger verbally. Remember the child may be angry with you, the deceased, or even God. This is okay. Help the child to talk it out by listening without judgment. Know what the child says is truth when spoken, but may be different tomorrow.

(2) Don't use terms like "going away", "passing on", "becoming an angel", or "going to sleep". Use the word "death", "died", etc. - terms of finality. These words may be painful at first but helpful in the long term because they are precise, exact, and truthful.

(3) Allow the child opportunities to be a child. This may include playing at the funeral, then grieving, then playing. This is acceptable, even healthy. Children are not capable of grieving as adults do. They can only grieve for short periods of time and then they vent their emotions through play.

(4) Don't give up on discipline. The grieving child wants schedules, limits, and love. Change in a child's normal rules and agendas only increases the feelings of loss and abandonment. Be as consistent as possible.

(5) Allow the child to express feelings of guilt. This is normal to a point. Don't argue about or deny the feelings. Give the child support and reassurance. Help to identify the feelings by clarifying the guilt with sentences like "I feel responsible for..." or "I wish I could change...".

(6) Don't insist that the child "be brave". This denies the child's right to show his/her real feelings. Don't be afraid to show your appropriate emotions in front of the child - it is okay. It models acceptable behavior for him/her and gives the child permission to grieve.

(7) Allow the child to observe others grieving. People grieve in many styles and degrees. Allow the child to question you about these styles - be honest. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

(8) Don't insist the child attend all the funeral related activities. Consider allowing the child private time before the viewing or funeral to be with the deceased. Some children are not emotionally prepared to attend a viewing or the burial. Give the child the non-judgmental option of attending or not. Another type of personal memorial between the child and deceased may be more meaningful to him (planting a tree, painting a picture, making a memory book, singing a song, etc.)

(9) Allow your loved one's name to come up in conversation as a way of remembrance. This reassures the child that "dead" does not mean "forgotten". Be natural about this and the child will feel free to do the same.

(10) Don't try to rush the grieving or the healing. Every adult and every child grows through the process at his own pace. Be patient. Healing happens through the process of mourning.

(11) Allow yourself time, space, and memories. Give hugs and accept hugs as valuable expressions of the strength and endurance of the human spirit.

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES IN A CHILD'S UNDERSTANDING OF GRIEF

Infancy

An infant understands nothing about death. By a year or 18 months, the child may show signs of stress if separated from someone he/she is accustomed to being around.

Preschool

Death is difficult for a preschooler to understand because words like "forever" don't mean anything to him. He believes death is a temporary state and that the dead person will come alive again. To them, the whole world is "concrete" since preschoolers have not yet begun to think abstractly. Their world is also shaped by what they watch on TV. For example, cartoon characters magically arise up whole again. They also do not realize that everyone will die sooner or later. Be consistent with your answers about the reality of death. Your child needs to hear the same information over and over again until it begins to sink in. Good books are an excellent teaching method for children of this age to learn about death.

Ages Five to Eight

Most children begin to realize that death is final and that all living things die, but they may not yet see death as personal. The child sees death as happening to someone else but not to them. Children at this age can feel very powerful and may feel guilty because they believe they could have prevented the death from happening. They are usually less willing to talk about death. They may hide their feelings more. They may picture death more in a physical form such as a skeleton, angel or monster. Their fears may be expressed in concerns that a parent will lose them or will not be there when needed. Such fears may show up in nightmares. Death as a permanent separation begins to have meaning.

Ages Nine to Twelve

Death is seen as universal, personal and final. They now understand that death can happen to young as well as old people and they know death has many different causes. However, they still think death usually happens to other people. At age ten, the child begins to have real fears that a parent might die and may have nightmares about this. The child will have a lot of questions about funerals, what happens, etc. The child begins to realize that the feelings of others are important too.

Teenage

Teenagers can understand all the major implications of death: biological, spiritual, social and psychological. However, death is often romanticized. Teenagers may become intrigued with death or even take unnecessary risks as a sort of "dare" as an attempt to overcome their fears. They often spend time fantasizing about their own deaths, often to the dismay of their parents.

PLEASE NOTE:

This information is a guideline for parents to help them understand the developmental stage their child is at. However, it is important to remember that children are individuals and each have their own ways of expressing and handling feelings. Just as all adults do not grieve in the same manner, neither do children.

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