



CareDimensions

HOSPICE | PALLIATIVE CARE | SUPPORT SERVICES

## Beyond Surviving

From [www.survivorsofsuicide.com](http://www.survivorsofsuicide.com)

Struggle with "why" it happened until you no longer need to know "why" or until you are satisfied with a partial answer.

Know you may feel overwhelmed by the intensity of your feelings. All your feelings are normal.

Anger, guilt, confusion, forgetfulness are common responses. You are not crazy, you are in mourning.

**REMEMBER, NO ONE IS THE SOLE INFLUENCE IN ANOTHER'S LIFE.**

### GRIEF IS OK

**IT'S OKAY TO GRIEVE:** The death of a loved one is a reluctant and drastic amputation, without any anesthesia. The pain cannot be described, and no scale can measure the loss. We despise the truth that the death cannot be reversed, and that somehow our dear one returned. Such hurt!! It's okay to grieve.

**IT'S OKAY TO CRY:** Tears release the flood of sorrow, of missing and of love. Tears relieve the brute force of hurting, enabling us to "level off" and continue our cruise along the stream of life. It's okay to cry.

**IT'S OKAY TO HEAL:** We do not need to "prove" we loved him or her. As the months pass, we are slowly able to move around with less outward grieving each day. We need not feel "guilty", for this is not an indication that we love less. It means that, although we don't like it, we are learning to accept death. It's a healthy sign of healing. It's okay to heal.

**IT'S OKAY TO LAUGH:** Laughter is not a sign of "less" grief. Laughter is not a sign of "less" love. It's a sign that many of our thoughts and memories are happy ones. It's a sign that we know our memories are happy ones. It's a sign that we know our dear one would have us laugh again. It's okay to laugh.

### ... IF WE AVOID GRIEF WILL IT GO AWAY?

Grief is as old as mankind but is one of the most neglected of human problems. As we become aware of this neglect, we come to realize the enormous cost that it has been to the individual, to the families and to society, in terms of pain and suffering because we have neglected the healing of grief.

Essential to a grieving person is to have at least one person who will allow them, give them permission to grieve. Some people can turn to a friend or to a family member. Some find a support group that will allow one to be the way one needs to be at the present as they work through their grief.

Dealing appropriately with grief is important in helping to preserve healthy individuals and nurturing families, to avoid destroying bodies and their psyche, their marriages and their relationships.

You can postpone grief but you cannot avoid it. As other stresses come along, one becomes less able to cope if one has other unresolved grief.

*Care Dimensions offers comprehensive grief support services at the Bertolon Center for Grief & Healing in Danvers, its office in Wellesley and in locations throughout our service area. For more information, please call 855-774-5100 or visit [www.CareDimensions.org](http://www.CareDimensions.org)*



# CareDimensions

HOSPICE | PALLIATIVE CARE | SUPPORT SERVICES

It requires a great deal of energy to avoid grief and robs one of energy for creative expression in relating to other people and in living a fulfilling life. It limits one's life potential.

Suppressing grief keeps one in a continual state of stress and shock, unable to move from it. Our body feels the effects of it in ailments. Our emotional life suffers. Our spiritual life suffers. We say that the person is "stuck in grief".

When a person faces his grief, allows his feeling to come, speaks of his grief, allows its expression, it is then that the focus is to move from death and dying and to promote life and living.

## WHY WE GRIEVE DIFFERENTLY

We accept without question uniqueness in the physical world.....fingerprints, snowflakes, etc. But we often refuse that same reality in our emotional world. This understanding is needed, especially in the grieving process.

No two people will ever grieve the same way, with the same intensity or for the same duration.

It is important to understand this basic truth. Only then can we accept our own manner of grieving and be sensitive to another's response to loss. Only then are we able to seek out the nature of support we need for our own personalized journey back to wholeness and be able to help others on their own journey.

Not understanding the individuality of grief could complicate and delay whatever grief we might experience from our own loss. It could also influence us, should we attempt to judge the grieving of others - even those we might most want to help.

Each of us is a unique combination of diverse past experiences. We each have a different personality, style, various way of coping with stress situations, and our own attitudes influence how we accept the circumstances around us. We are also affected by the role and relationship that each person in a family system had with the departed, by circumstances surrounding the death and by influences in the present.

**PAST EXPERIENCE ...** Past experiences from childhood on, have a great impact on how we are able to handle loss in the present.

What other losses have we faced in our childhood, adolescence, adulthood? How frightening were these experiences? Was there good support? Were feelings allowed to be expressed in a secure environment? Has there been a chance to recover and heal from these earlier losses?

What other life stresses have been going on prior to this recent loss? Has there been a move to a new area? Were there financial difficulties, problems or illness with another member of the family or with ourself?

What has our previous mental health history been like? Have we had bouts with depression?

Have we harbored suicidal thoughts? Have we experienced a nervous breakdown? Have we been treated with medication or been hospitalized?

*Care Dimensions offers comprehensive grief support services at the Bertolon Center for Grief & Healing in Danvers, its office in Wellesley and in locations throughout our service area. For more information, please call 855-774-5100 or visit [www.CareDimensions.org](http://www.CareDimensions.org)*



CareDimensions

HOSPICE | PALLIATIVE CARE | SUPPORT SERVICES

How has our family cultural influences conditioned us to respond to loss and the emotions of grief (stoic father, emotional mother, etc.)?

**RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DECEASED.....**No outsider is able to determine the special bond that connects two people, regardless of the relationship, role or length of time the relationship has been in existence.

Our relationship with the deceased has a great deal to do with the intensity and duration of our grief.

What was that relationship? Was the deceased a spouse? A child? A parent? A friend? A sibling?

How strong was the attachment to the deceased? Was it a close, dependent relationship, or intermittent and independent? What was the degree of ambivalence (the love/hate balance) in that relationship?

It is not only the person, but also the role that person played in our life which is lost.

How major was that role? Was that person the sole breadwinner, the driver, the handler of financial matters? The only one who could fix a decent dinner? Was that person a main emotional support, an only friend? How dependent were we on the role that person filled?

**CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THE DEATH.....**The circumstances surrounding the death;

i.e., how the death occurred, are extremely important in determining how we are going to come to an acceptance of the loss.

Was the loss in keeping with the laws of Nature as when a person succumbs to old age? Or was order thrown into chaos, as when a parent lives to see a child die?

What warnings were there that there would be a loss? Was there time to prepare, time to gradually come to terms with the inevitable? Or did death come so suddenly that there was no anticipation of its arrival?

Do we feel that this death could have been prevented or forestalled? How much responsibility am I taking for this death?

Do we feel that the deceased accomplished what he or she was meant to fulfill in this lifetime?

Was their life full and rewarding? How much was left unsaid or undone between ourselves and the deceased? Does the extent of unfinished business foster a feeling of guilt?

**INFLUENCES IN THE PRESENT.....**We have looked at the past, at the relationship, and how the loss occurred. Now we see how the influences in the present can impact how we are finally going to come to terms with a current loss.

Age and sex are important factors.

Are we young enough and resilient enough to bounce back? Are we old enough and wise enough to accept the loss and to grow with the experience? Can our life be rebuilt again? What opportunities does life offer now? Is health a problem?

*Care Dimensions offers comprehensive grief support services at the Bertolon Center for Grief & Healing in Danvers, its office in Wellesley and in locations throughout our service area. For more information, please call 855-774-5100 or visit [www.CareDimensions.org](http://www.CareDimensions.org)*



What are the secondary losses that are the result of this death? Loss of income? Home? Family breakup? What other stresses or crises are present?

Our personality, present stability of mental health, and coping behavior play a significant role in our response to the loss.

What kind of role expectations do we have for ourselves? What are those imposed by friends, relatives and others? Are we expected to be the "strong one" or is it alright for us to break down and have someone else take care of us? Are we going to try to assume an unrealistic attempt to satisfy everyone's expectations, or are we going to withdraw from the entire situation?

What is there in our social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds that give us strength and comfort?

What role do rituals play in our recovery? Do our religious or philosophical beliefs bring comfort or add sorrow and guilt? What kind of social support is there in our lives during this emotional upheaval?

**CONCLUSION.....**When a person who is a part of our life dies, understanding the uniqueness of this loss can guide us in finding the support we will need and to recognize when help should come from outside family or friends.

When the loss is experienced by someone we would like to help or by someone under our care, this same understanding is essential. Thus we can guard against a temptation to compare or to judge their grief responses to our own. The awareness of those factors which affect the manner, intensity and duration of grief, should enable us to guide the grieving person in seeking those forms of support suggested by the nature of their loss and the unique way it affects them.

*by Jinny Tesik, M.A.*