

Realistic Expectations During the Grief Process

Adapted from How To Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies by Therese A. Rando, Ph.D. (1988)

Grief will take longer than most people think.

Grief takes more energy than we ever imagine.

Grief shows itself in all spheres of our lives – emotional, social, physical, and spiritual.

Grief is not only for the actual person lost, but also for the hopes, dreams, unfulfilled expectations and unmet needs.

Grief involves many changes and develops continually.

One's grief experience is often related to how the loss is perceived.

New losses bring up grief from the past, often leading us through an array of confusing feelings at once.

Grief can temporarily affect decision-making and problem-solving abilities, and cause difficulties in concentrating.

Sometimes grief makes one feel "crazy", confused, or disoriented.

Grief spasms (acute upsurges of grief occurring suddenly with no warning) are common.

In the future, some events can stimulate grief, especially the "firsts" (holidays, celebrations, travel, appointments, etc.).

Society has unrealistic expectations about grief and the mourning process, so well-meaning people may respond inappropriately.

Family members can not always provide the support one expects, and their grief process may be very different.

Sometimes people have enough social support to help them through loss. But more often, they need to reach out for support, let others know what they need, and actively build a network that facilitates personal growth and transformation.

"In the distance, I can faintly see the proverbial light at the end of all this, but I have to walk some long dark tunnel to reach it." ~ Anonymous

Myths About Grief

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All losses are the same.

All bereaved people grieve in the same way.

It is better to ignore or suppress painful feelings during grief.

Grief always declines with time, usually in a steadily decreasing fashion.

When grief is resolved, it never comes up again.

Your life will be unchanged by grief.

Expressing intense feelings is the same as losing control.

Relationships with your loved one will not continue after their death.

Funerals, memorial services, and other personal rituals are unimportant in coping with death.

Family members and friends always help each other during times of loss.

Feeling the pain of loss means you do not have faith in God or trust in your religion.

The intensity and length of your grief is testimony to your love for the bereaved.

There is no reason to be angry with a loved one who has died.

Losing someone to a sudden death is the same as losing someone to an anticipated death.

Since mourning is very personal, it is not important to have support from others.

**We accept the graceful falling
Of mountain cherry blossoms,
But it is much harder for us
To fall away from our own
Attachment to the world.** ~ Rengetsu, a Buddhist nun