

Ten Things to Know About Grief

Material Courtesy of
Victoria Hospice Bereavement Program

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, volunteers, and bereaved people identified the ten things discussed below as important in understanding your grief.

1. Global effect of loss

The death of someone very close to you can be a life-transforming event that effects all aspects of yourself and your life. It can feel as if your world has been shattered. The grief process is the journey between how things were and how they will be. It is an interior journey, like a labyrinth, moving toward central issues of meaning.

2. Grief is a natural process

The grief you feel at the death of someone important to you is the consequence of living and loving, of your meaningful connections with others. Grief is a normal part of life and a natural response to loss. Information about the phases of grief can help you to understand the responses that you experience.

3. Individual differences in grieving styles

Although grief has some definable outlines, how you grieve is a unique result of your personality, your past history of loss, and the relationship that you had with the person who died. Each person in your family will grieve in their own way and with their own timetable. To cope with their grief, some people will openly express the emotions that they experience while others will control their thoughts and emotions. Neither of these styles 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 and will not talk about their thoughts and feelings of loss unless the adults do. Children are frightened by what they do not know or understand, so simple information about death and grief is helpful to them.

5. Social connections and support

When you are grieving you want and need support from others now more than ever. Due to awkwardness or their own feelings of grief, some people may not be able to provide the understanding and caring that you expected from them. Because all of

the relationships in your life will be altered 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 as your emotions, your mind, and your reactions seem unreliable. It is possible that you are feeling intense pain and emotions that you have never felt before. You are not going crazy; this is a natural part of grief. Responses such as fatigue, forgetfulness and irritability result from your attention and energy being directed toward your grief and adjustment to loss.

7. Fluctuations in the grief process

As you journey along the path of grief, you will find that your feelings and responses vary 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 particular journey.

8. Self-care and what helps

There are things that you can do to help

yourself at this challenging time. Getting information about grief can help you to understand your responses and your journey. Be gentle and patient with yourself as you grieve. Do what you can to keep some normal routine for health and social contact. Support may come from a variety of sources; family, friends, bereavement groups, chat rooms, etc. If you are concerned about yourself and your grief, seek professional counselling help.

9. Time for grief

Despite what you may hear about 'getting over it' or 'the first year', there are no time lines for grief; it takes as long as it takes. Often your grief journey is longer than you or other people expected and you may feel pressure to be better than you are by now, whenever this is. It is certain that this loss will continue to be part of your life and that 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 significant in your life brings change that puts you on a different life path. Nothing will ever be the same, yet you must somehow go on and find meaning in the new path before you. As the journey continues, you may experience healing and personal growth as a result of the suffering you have endured and the lessons that you have learned about what you truly value.

We have chosen the image of the labyrinth as a metaphor for the journey through grief. A labyrinth is not a maze as there are no dead ends and no wrong turnings. There is only one way - forward. So it is with grief. The only way through is forward, with many turns and going back and forth over what seems like the same territory. We journey to the centre of our grief, to the centre of ourselves, and then slowly return to re-enter the world.

Each person's experience on the journey of grief will be different. This is a reflection of our personal style, our relationship with the person who died, our internal and social resources, and our past history of coping. As you journey through your own grief process, there will likely be unexpected turns and insights.

*For bereavement support in your area,
call the BC Bereavement Helpline at 1-
877-779-2223 or contact your local
Hospice Society.*

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Hospice Enhancement Program

Partners
BC Bereavement Helpline
BC Hospice Palliative Care Association
Living Through Loss Counseling Society
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