

**Because you are losing an important person in your life, many difficult changes can occur including:**

- Loss of energy and vitality;
- Family members may feel a sense of isolation, as the family focuses their energies on caring for their dying loved one;
- The best and worst of family characteristics may come out at this time;
- Communication can break down and misunderstanding can increase tension;
- Limited finances can increase stress, as medical expenses increase;
- Uncertainty about the dying process and feelings of lack of control can be overwhelming.

There are many ways that you can care for yourself during your loved one's illness that can lessen the negative aspect of anticipatory grieving. Plan to have some time for yourself everyday. Seek out ways to nurture yourself, including: eating well, sleeping enough, exercising, and spending time with a friend for hugs and laughs. It is only possible to care for others if you first take care of yourself.

There are a wide variety of feelings and behaviors which can be experienced in the grief process. Not everyone will respond to loss in the same way. It is helpful to know that the following characteristics can be a normal part of the grief experience:

### **Feelings**

Feelings that are part of the grieving process include: shock; numbness; sense of unreality; anger; irritability; guilt; self reproach; sadness; depression; anxiety; fear; hysteria; helplessness; vulnerability; low self-esteem; loneliness; relief; feelings of being crazy; mood swings; intensity of all feelings.

### **Physical Sensations**

Physical sensations experienced during grief include: hollowness in the stomach; tightness in the chest and throat; dry mouth; over sensitivity to noise; dizziness; headaches; shortness of breath; weakness in the muscles; lack of energy; fatigue; excess of nervous energy; heart pounding; heavy or empty feeling in body and limbs; hot or cold flashes; skin sensitivity; stomach and intestinal upsets; increase in physical illness.

### **Thought Patterns**

Grief-related thought patterns include: disbelief; sense of unreality; preoccupation; confusion; lack of ability to concentrate; seeing, hearing; feeling the presence of the deceased; thoughts of self destruction; problems with decision making.

### **Behaviors**

Behaviors while experiencing grief include: appetite and sleep disturbances; absent-minded behavior; social withdrawal; avoiding reminders of the loss; dreams of the loss; searching and calling out for the deceased; restlessness; sighing; crying; visiting places that are reminders of the loss; treasuring or carrying objects that belonged to the deceased; change in sexual activities; need for touch; hugs; contacts with others; increased sensitivity to positive and negative attention; picking up mannerisms of the deceased; exhibiting symptoms of deceased's illness.

### **Social Changes**

Social changes brought on by a grieving process include: Either an increased desire for support of close friends or a withdrawal from friends and family; increased dependency on others; a need for acting normal around others; a need for relationships apart from those related to grief; being self-absorbed (no energy for or interest in others); marital difficulties—especially with the death of a child; role changes; role reversals; change in social patterns and status; hypersensitivity to topics of loss; need for rituals.

## Suggestions for Coping With Grief

- **Allow Yourself to Feel Your Feelings**  
Someone close to you has died. Many emotions may arise. It's okay to feel angry, depressed, or even feel a sense of relief at the time of death.
- **Access Your Support System**  
Reach out to people who are supportive to you. Family, friends, support groups, clergy or a therapist may be helpful.
- **Share Your Feelings of Grief**  
Talking about your feelings can be a relief. Don't hide your emotions from those who care about you.
- **Educate Yourself About Grief Issues**  
Reading literature about grief can help you in understanding what you are experiencing.
- **Take Care of Your Physical Self**  
Remember that your emotional state can be affected by your physical state. Attempt to eat balanced meals, get adequate sleep, and do some form of exercise each day.
- **Avoid Alcohol and Other Substances Not Prescribed By Your Physician**  
Although they may numb the emotional pain initially, drugs and alcohol may prolong, delay and complicate your grief.
- **Give Yourself Permission to Say "No"**  
Try not to rush or take on new responsibilities.
- **Be Patient and Gentle with Yourself**  
Healing from grief takes time. Your grief may not look like the grief of others around you. Respect your own individual grief style.

## Helping Children Deal With Their Grief

Children re-grieve. They work through their grief in cycles. Each time a new developmental milestone is attained, children will integrate and use their newly acquired skills to gain further understanding of their grief. The child's history of loss and coping strategies, as well as the child's age and developmental stage will affect the child's re-grieving experience.

Children are often repetitive in their grief. By asking the same questions over and over again, they are able to come to terms with their grief. Answering a child's repeated questions with the same information gives the child a sense of stability, constancy, and trust in their relationship with you.

Children grieve as part of a family. When a loved-one is diagnosed with a terminal illness, it affects the way in which the family functions. Family roles and responsibilities may adjust to accommodate the new needs in the family structure. Children may grieve not only for the dying loved one, but also for the secondary losses which result, for example; changes in routine, decreased attention from parents, increased individual responsibilities, etc.

Young children are concrete thinkers. Adults frequently use euphemisms (the substitution of a "good" term in place of one considered "bad") when describing death or dying to soften the blow of this harsh reality. Adults need to be careful when using euphemisms, so that children aren't even more scared or further confused. For instance, if an adult says, "We lost Grandma today," a child may want to know why people aren't looking for her. A child may also wonder, "If I get lost, will anyone come looking for me?" Similarly, an explanation like "Dad is sleeping peacefully now," may create in the child a fear of sleeping.

## **You can help children cope with death and dying**

Children need clear and honest information about their loved one's diagnosis (cause of illness) and prognosis (prediction of the outcome of the illness) at a level which they can understand.

Include children in discussions of the patient's condition, changes in health status, and of the signs and symptoms of approaching death, etc.

Encourage children to express their feelings directly. Talk with them about their perceptions and understanding of what is happening with their loved one. Acknowledging your own feelings lets your children know it is okay to experience and express theirs.

Offer choices whenever possible. For instance: helping with care giving at an age-appropriate level; attending the funeral service; viewing the body; participation on good-bye rituals/symbols, etc.

Let the hospice staff know if you have concerns or questions or are experiencing difficulties.

## **Children's Grief Web Site**

If there are children involved in your hospice care experience, there is a wonderful web site you should know about and visit. You'll find it on the world wide web at [www.safecrossings.org](http://www.safecrossings.org).

## **Emergency Preparedness Plan**

### **Disaster Supplies Kit**

There are six basics you should stock for your home:

Water, food, first aid supplies, clothing, bedding, tools, emergency supplies, and special items.

Keep items in an easy to carry container. Store your kit in a convenient place known to family.

### **Water**

- Store water in plastic containers such as soft drink bottles
- Store one gallon of water per person per day
- Keep at least a three-day supply of water per person

### **Food**

- Store at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food
- Ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits, and vegetables
- Canned juices
- Staples (salt, sugar, pepper, spices)
- High energy foods
- Vitamins
- Food for infants
- Comfort/stress foods

### **First Aid Kit**

- Bandages
- Germicidal hand wipes
- Antiseptic wipes
- Non-latex gloves
- Adhesive tape
- Antibacterial ointment
- Cold packs
- Scissors



*“The strongest have their moments of fatigue .”*

— Friedrich Nietzsche

## Non-Prescription Drugs

- Aspirin or non-aspirin pain reliever
- Anti-diarrhea medication
- Antacid
- Laxative

## Tools and Supplies

- Battery operated radio
- Extra batteries
- Flashlight
- Non-electric can opener
- Fire extinguisher
- Matches in water-proof container
- Signal flare
- Paper, pencil
- Medicine dropper

## Sanitation

- Toilet paper, towelettes
- Personal hygiene items
- Plastic garbage bags and ties
- Plastic bucket with tight lid
- Household chlorine bleach

## Clothing and Bedding

- At least one complete change of clothing and footwear per person
- Blanket or sleeping bags
- Thermal underwear
- Hat and gloves

## Special Items

- For baby—formula, diapers, bottles
- For adults—medications, denture needs, extra eye glasses

## Entertainment

- Games and books

## Tips

- Keep items in air-tight plastic bags
- Change your stored water supply every 6 months
- Replace your stored food every 6 months
- Replace batteries
- Update clothing, etc.

## Chemical Emergencies

If an accident involving hazardous materials occurs:

- You will be notified by the authorities what steps to take;
- You may hear a siren or be called by telephone, or emergency personnel may drive by giving instructions over a loudspeaker;
- Go indoors and listen to local Emergency Alert System stations for emergency instructions.



*Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear.*

—Ambrose Redmoon

## **Fire**

- Determine at least two ways to escape from every room in your home;
- Practice your escape plan at least twice a year;
- Use test button to check each smoke alarm monthly;
- Have 1-2 fire extinguishers in your home;
- Escape safely; once out—stay out! Call fire department from neighbor;
- If exits are blocked; stay in room with door closed. Signal for help using bright colored cloth at the window. If there's a telephone in the room, call fire department and tell them where you are.

## **Terrorism**

- Create an emergency communication plan;
  - Choose an out-of-town contact person your family will call or email to check on each other;
- Establish a meeting place;
- Assemble a disaster supplies kit;
- Remain calm and be patient;
- Follow advice of local emergency offices;
- Listen to your radio or television for instructions;
- If disaster occurs near your home, check damage using a flashlight;
- Shut off any damaged utilities;
- Confine pets;
- Call your family contact but don't tie up phone line.

## **Thunderstorms, Tornadoes, Lightning**

- Prepare a home tornado plan;
- Pick a place where family members could gather: basement, center hall-way, bathroom, closet on lowest level;
- Assemble your disaster supplies kit;
- Stay tuned for storm warnings (Radio or TV);
- When warning is issued, go to safe place you picked;
- If outside, hurry to basement or lie flat in ditch;
- If in car or mobile home, get out immediately and head for safety;
  - After storm passes:
- Watch out for fallen power lines;
- Listen to radio for information and instructions;
- Use flash light to inspect for damage;
- Do not use candles at any time;

## **Winter Storm**

- Have extra blankets on hand;
- Ensure that each member of your household has warm coat, gloves, mittens, hat, and boots;
- Assemble your disaster supply kit;
- Stay tuned for storm warning;
- Avoid unnecessary travel;
- Stay indoors;
- If you must go outside, wear several layers of light-weight clothing;
- Walk carefully on snowy, icy sidewalks;
- If you need to drive by vehicle, carry disaster kit in trunk; keep gas tank full; let someone know your destination and route.