

PERSPECTIVES ON
LOSS & GRIEF
ISSUE 4

- › Depression
- › Suggestions for Coping with Depression
- › How Long Will the Pain Last?
- › Why Me?
- › Other Resources

TRANSITIONS

A HOSPICE BEREAVEMENT NEWSLETTER

Dear Friends of Hospice:

Frequently, a person slides “into the pits” after the death of a loved one. It is also referred to as “feeling down,” “the blues,” “the blahs,” “down in the dumps,” “under the weather,” and “lower than a snake’s belly.” What people are describing is a normal human experience, an unavoidable part of grief: depression.

Strangely, when you are “in the pits” and tempted to despair, this may be the time when other people may expect you to be getting over your loss. Unfortunately, this may be when depression and despair are more intense and real to you.

What you are going through seems unfair and unjust. It is all right to be “weak,” to break down and cry. As the painful loss is realized, we need to release the energy, to empty the load of tears. Tears are as common to grief as laughter is to joy.

Sincerely,

The Bereavement Team

Tabitha Hospice, A Collaboration with Immanuel

DEPRESSION

Depression is a feeling, a mood, an emotion of being sad, frustrated and discouraged. It may feel like helplessness, expressed by, “I can’t go on,” “I can’t cope,” “What’s the point?” or “my life is over.” Nearly everyone experiences depression from time to time. It lets us know we are human and that some event in our life is causing us difficulty. Bereaved people have a good reason to feel down.

Depression can include irritability, withdrawal, no interest in usual activities, lack of energy, unusual self-criticism, loss of appetite, inability to sleep or excessive sleeping, difficulty concentrating and making decisions, and a general inability to function.

We are a society that fears and fights depression. As bereaved people, it is important to not become alarmed by symptoms of depression. It is a normal part of grief.

continued on Page 2

Words of *Wisdom*

“The soul always knows what to do to heal itself. The challenge is to silence the mind.”

Caroline Myss

“Sadness is but a wall between two gardens.”

Khalil Gibran

continued from Page 3

It may sound contradictory, but by accepting the feeling of helplessness, we can actually help ourselves. Instead of asking, “Why me?” we can ask, “Why not me?” No one ever said that life would be easy. Think to yourself, “I have taken charge of my life in the past. I can do it again.”

This attitude can empower us to confront our problems. By accepting the pain and trusting that it will not last forever, we are regaining some control. Although we had no control over the illness and death, we can choose how we are going to confront and react to the misfortune. By facing life with courage but giving ourselves permission to “fall apart” when we need to, we will heal. Our strength will continue to grow if we allow ourselves to feel scared, weak and vulnerable when we need to. We can grow beyond today’s pain and move forward to a better future. May we each have the courage to be weak, thereby growing strong.

OTHER RESOURCES

For additional support, please contact our Hospice Bereavement Team at 402.819.4949.

For additional reading materials, please contact The Centering Corporation at 866.218.0101 or www.centering.org



TABITHA
Hospice

A COLLABORATION
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 Immanuel

Consulting a Professional

When should you become concerned enough about your depression to seek professional help?

- › If the symptoms become severe and continue over an extended period of time.
- › If the pain and problems outweigh pleasure most of the time.
- › If you are completely retreating from the outside world and have thoughts of suicide.
- › If you are living in a world with little emotional satisfaction either in self, activities or others.
- › If you find yourself coping by using drugs or alcohol.

When you do go to a doctor or counselor, be sure to state that you are grieving, so that your depression will be understood and treated in that context.

Rediscovering Your Identity

Lowered self-esteem is often experienced along with depression. When an important person in your life dies, your self-worth and self-respect—which you took for granted—seem to be gone. When someone you love has been taken away from you, you may feel that a part of you has died also.

In the case of a spouse's death, the "we" part of your identity does not exist anymore, and you may begin to wonder who you really are. This feeling does not need to go on forever, however. As you move along in your grief process, you will learn to let go and allow yourself to change.

Making the Change

Changing takes some effort on your part, and it isn't easy. You learn new things about yourself. You learn to change your way of dealing with people. You learn to change your attitudes. You learn ways of handling everyday situations. You learn that the trust and faith you need come from inside you.

There is no magic formula for regaining your self-esteem. You will need to work on it, and gradually you will become more comfortable with yourself and realize how important you really are. As you change, accept the fact that you are worthwhile, and you need to be good to yourself.

→ HOW LONG WILL THE PAIN LAST?

How long do I have to wait for this pain to be over? Unfortunately, there is no timeline for grief, and if you put yourself on a timetable, you are likely to be very disappointed. Psychologists and others who have studied grief tell us that it often takes years to work through the loss of a loved one.

The first year is difficult because of all the "firsts"—the first birthday, the first anniversary, the first Christmas, etc. But that doesn't mean the grief will be over on day 366. Rather than feeling a little better as each day goes by, you will find that grief is more like a roller coaster ride. You will have some good days and some bad days. As time goes by, you will have more good days and fewer bad days.

You will probably find that your friends and family have ideas on how long your grief should last. They may tell you that you "should be over this by now." It is important to be patient and gentle with yourself and take as much time as you need for your grief. Each person is different, and there are no rules on how long to grieve. The fewer expectations you have for yourself, the better your grief will progress.

Coping gets easier as time goes by. Life gradually returns to a new type of "normal." You will begin to feel good again, but you won't return to being exactly the way you once were. Accept yourself for who you are and who you are becoming.

WHY ME?

When someone we care about dies, we often ask ourselves, "Why me? Why do I have to suffer?" Unfortunately, there are no answers forthcoming to the questions. If we continue to ask "Why?" and try to justify the loss, we may find ourselves becoming even more miserable. We all feel a sense of powerlessness or loss of control at the time of a death. Lack of control is a difficult reality to accept. Yet if we continue to ask "Why?" and find no answer, this loss of power becomes even greater.

continued on Page 4

SUGGESTIONS FOR COPING WITH DEPRESSION

- ▶ Realize that depression is a normal part of grief. It is best to face it and work through it, rather than avoid it.
- ▶ Recognize that the major responsibility for dealing with depression lies with you. Acknowledge the depression and be open to accepting help.
- ▶ Identify things that are most troubling to you. Make a list of things you need to do. It often looks less overwhelming on paper than it does in your mind.
- ▶ Exercise helps you to relax and relieve tension. It will also help you sleep better.
- ▶ Try harder to like yourself. Treat yourself as you would a good friend.
- ▶ Try replacing negative thoughts with positive ones when they surface.
- ▶ Keep interested in other people and be involved with helping them. Caring about others helps you keep problems in a realistic perspective.
- ▶ Avoid depressive situations and people. Try to look at life in a more positive way. Try to keep from expecting that bad things will happen to you.
- ▶ Attempt to think pleasant thoughts for one minute. Then develop this habit.
- ▶ Do something you enjoy and that you do well. Little accomplishments will help you regain self-confidence.
- ▶ Remember that you have a choice. Depression does not have to control you and ruin your life. It can be managed.