Grief and Mourning

What is grief?
Grief is the normal, emotional response to a loss. Each person grieves in his or her own way. There is no right way to grieve. There is no specific timetable for completing the grief process. While grief is often associated with the death of a loved one, it may also be experienced at the time of other losses such as the loss of function due to illness, loss of a pet, loss through divorce, loss of future dreams or role changes, and many other changes in life or health.

What is mourning?
Mourning is the outward expression of grief and includes rituals and customs such as funerals, viewing of the body, cremation and other customs. Each religion, culture, ethnicity and even different parts of the same country may have different expressions of mourning.

What reactions may be expected during the grief process?
Grief affects a person’s behavior, emotions, mental and physical well being. Among the physical experiences are such things as:
- Tightness in the chest and throat, breathlessness
- Headaches and dizziness
- Exhaustion or weakness
- Dry mouth
- Muscle aches

Among the thoughts are:
- Disbelief and shock
- Confusion and difficulty concentrating
- Hallucinations
- Preoccupation with the deceased

Some of the emotions that are most often felt include:
- Sadness or helplessness
- Anger, which may be directed at God, family, health care providers, or the person who died
- Shock, guilt, or anxiety

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Numbness or ambivalence
Yearning
Shame
Fear

Changes in behavior may include:
Sleeping more or less
Eating more or less
Withdrawal from usual activities
Crying
Over activity or keeping busy
Dreaming of the deceased

What can be done to help the healing process?
Give yourself permission to grieve
Get plenty of rest, exercise and eat a healthy diet
Try to have at least one close person with whom you share your feelings and receive support
Consider keeping a journal to write down your feelings
Don’t push yourself to make changes in your life too quickly
Reminiscing and putting together a memory book provide an active way to heal
Get information about the normal grief process
Attend a community grief support group

What should be reported?
Persistent intense grief reactions months after the loss (not just occasional intense grief reactions)
Thoughts of suicide or self-harm
Social isolation
Unplanned changes in weight
Increase in use of alcohol or drugs

Your team cares about your well-being long after your loss. Take care to ensure you recover from your loss by creating a “new normal” way of life.

Other HPNA Teaching Sheets on are available at www.HPNA.org.

Reference

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