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About this eBook

This eBook explains the effects of grief experienced when going through the normal transitions of life. The topics covered are:

- grief and ageing
- grief and the 'empty nest syndrome'
- grief and 'midlife crisis'
- grief and retirement
- grief and old age.

The information in this eBook will help individuals, families and those who are involved in supporting people in grief to come to:

- an understanding that grief is a natural human response to loss
- an understanding of the natural flow of transitions in life
- an understanding and acceptance of loss experienced through ageing
- a realisation of the importance of recognising, acknowledging and validating the feelings being experienced by those in grief.

The information contained in this eBook is gathered from:

- research done by the author on these subjects
- the author's personal experience and that of loved ones going through life transitions
- the author's interactions with various organisations in the field of death, loss, grief and bereavement.

Also included are comments and opinions based on the author's many years of involvement in the field of grief and bereavement support.

Grief and life's transitions

What is grief?

Grief is a process that we go through when we experience loss. The process of grief forces us to face different feelings, which come in phases and which are the natural human response to death and significant loss.

The purpose of grief

The grief process allows us to eventually reach acceptance of the loss and come to the realisation that we have to keep on living in a healthy way despite the loss. Different phases of grief are experienced by every loss we have. The more significant the loss is and the more resistance we have to accepting it, the harder it is to progress through these phases.

The phases of grief

Some of the more obvious feelings that come in phases, not necessarily in any particular order, are:

- denial
- anger
- bargaining
- guilt
- depression
- and eventually acceptance.

This eBook is about how grief affects some people as we age. If you would like further understanding of grief and the phases of grief, please refer to the Memorable Farewells® eBook entitled, 'Grief and Mourning and the Phases of Grief,' which explains the process and phases of grief and mourning in more detail.

Ageing

Society and ageing

We live in a society that favours and even glorifies youth, and does not honour and respect the natural process of ageing. Over the years, anti-ageing has become a multi-billion dollar industry offering everything from creams and surgeries, to chemical products that are called 'wonder treatments' to reduce the signs of ageing.

For various personal reasons people choose to change their appearance in order to look younger. Some people colour their hair or shave off their hair, some cover up bald patches, and some undergo plastic surgery, etc. The practice of trying to look younger can become problematic if it is driven solely by an unhealthy resistance to ageing.

Many people fear growing old and resist reflecting on what they may look like and on how they may feel in their later years, because they are uncomfortable and anxious about ageing. Resisting ageing is resisting life itself, since the ageing process is inherent in living.

Ageing and the grief process

As we age we grieve the loss of youth and the diminishing abilities that are part of ageing in all aspects of life. Some of the feelings associated with the grief process in ageing follow.

Denial of ageing

Denial of ageing hinders us from acknowledging the grief that is a normal response to the losses experienced as we age. Using anti-ageing creams and chemicals or undergoing surgery to reduce the signs of ageing are ways of denying the fact of ageing. This denial robs us of the opportunity to work through the grief experienced at each noticeable stage of ageing.

Anger and ageing

Anger is another feeling that is experienced with regard to ageing. This anger could be due to the fact that there is no turning the clock back with regard to ageing. People who feel angry about ageing may not be conscious of the anger but it can be triggered at the mention of their age or by a remark about the way they look with regard to their age.

Acceptance of ageing

As with all losses, we have to acknowledge and validate the feelings of grief and work through them, otherwise we get stuck in the process of grief. We must accept the changes and grieve for the losses we experience as part of ageing. Accepting and validating the feelings experienced with regard to ageing and learning to be open to the natural changes we undergo in life helps us to live without stress and anxiety each time we notice another sign of ageing.

Ageing gracefully

Feelings of grief will come and go with different intensity, at different times and in different phases. Learning to accept the fact that we are ageing helps us to realise that there is a natural flow in the transitions of life. At the same time, if we learn to be comfortable with the changes we experience as we age it will help us to age gracefully.