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About this eBook

This eBook explains the effects of grief experienced in different circumstances of death and other significant loss, such as sudden death, suicide, divorce or separation, and loss related to relocating and emigrating.

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

- To understand that grief is a natural human response to loss.
- To realise the importance of recognising, acknowledging and validating the feelings being experienced by those in grief.
- To help those in grief to work through the debilitating effects of grief and eventually learn to continue to live in a healthy way with acceptance of the loss.

The information contained in this eBook was gathered from:

- The author's extensive research on this subject.
- The author's personal experience of having loved ones who died suddenly or committed the act of suicide, from suffering other significant loss such as divorce, immigrating to Australia from Kenya and relocating several times within Australia.
- 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 direct involvement in the field of grief and bereavement support.

Grief and other significant losses

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.

Further understanding of grief and mourning

This eBook is about grief suffered in significant losses. 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.

Grief and sudden death

When a loved one dies unexpectedly from an accident, illness or other reason the effect is traumatic. No one can be prepared for the news of a sudden death. There is no easy way to deal with the news of a sudden and tragic death of a loved one.

Shock

The initial reaction to the news is shock. No matter how the news is conveyed the reaction will be one of shock, but it is easier to cope with the shock if the person receiving the news has someone to support him or her.

The person receiving the news should be allowed to cry, scream or rage if he or she needs to do so.

The person who has lost a loved one should have the opportunity to ask as many questions and be given as much information as is available regarding the circumstances of the death, otherwise the grieving process could be compounded by the initial incredulity, frustration and confusion.

The shock can be so severe that most people are completely thrown into a state of disbelief, denial and questioning, seeking an answer to 'why'?

Preoccupation with details of the death

As well as the feelings of being overwhelmed, confused, angry, helpless, or guilt which are normal effects of grief, details of a loved one's death may preoccupy the person to such an extent that he or she can think of little else. These thoughts and feelings are constantly on the person's mind during waking hours and can often intrude into dreams, presenting themselves in various forms and circumstances.

Whether or not the actual facts surrounding the sudden death are known, to come to terms with the fact that the death has occurred, the person will keep reviewing details which are either based on factual reports or made up to go along with what is imagined to have happened. This review is important for two reasons, firstly, there is the need to try and determine exactly who or what was responsible, and secondly, there is the need to remember the circumstances surrounding the death.

Placing blame

Placing blame is another common reaction to a sudden death, especially if the death was accidental. In some cases, the findings of the autopsy, which is a legal requirement, can eliminate certain causes of death or reasons for blame, specifically those related to drugs or alcohol. As the person analyses and questions the circumstances of the death he or she will review the evidence of any witnesses and the investigator's findings. Even after the formal investigation ends and the results are known, the person will continue to go through his or her own process of trying to answer the question 'why'?

Guilt

Guilt is an insidious invisible human reaction that is sometimes difficult to recognise and is one of the hardest phases of grief to cope with when someone dies suddenly. Feelings of guilt are normal because, as human beings have an almost innate conviction that we should be able to protect those we love from harm or pain.

So, when a loved one dies we immediately go through the process of examining in what way we are to blame or how could we have avoided the death.