

Helping you through this difficult time

The employees of Spectrum Health Hospice extend our sympathy to you during this time of grief. We hope that the following insights will help you during the coming days, months, and years.

Everyone handles grief in different ways, there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Grieving persons often ask, “How long will these feelings last?” This, too, varies between individuals. We offer the following information to help you recognize that your responses are normal and to move through this period more easily.

In the first few months

After the hectic period surrounding the funeral, you may begin to experience a variety of physical and emotional changes. It can be helpful to know what these are and that these changes can be a normal response to grief. You may:

- Suffer physical symptoms such as headaches, nausea or diarrhea
- Have chest pains, shortness of breath or tightening in the throat
- Experience total body fatigue or changes in your sleep patterns
- Overeat or eat too little
- Find yourself in tears at unexpected times
- Face an array of unexpected emotions such as feeling numb or almost emotionally frozen
- Find that your loss seems unreal
- Feel deep sadness, anger, anxiety or loneliness
- Feel you are going crazy or feel relieved

You may be uncomfortable with some of these feelings. During these times, it is important to allow yourself to feel your emotions. Don't be afraid to cry or ask for support. Talking with others can help you cope during this difficult time.

Four or more months after a death

This may be a very challenging time. Like many grieving people, you may feel worse than you did right after the death. There are many reasons for this; the company has gone home; the phone calls and sympathy cards have decreased or stopped coming. Your numbness is wearing off and you begin to realize what your loss is going to mean for you.

Meanwhile, your family and friends may not understand the length of time the grieving process takes. You may feel pressure from them to return to “normal.”

Because this time of grieving can leave you feeling tired and distracted, you may find that you are accident-prone. Be especially careful when driving. You also may find that you are inclined to avoid your feelings by being busy or to self-medicate. Be careful that you don't attempt to drown your pain in work, food, spending sprees, drugs or alcohol.

Instead, reach out for the support of others – family members, friends, a spiritual leader or counselor. You need them to praise your accomplishments, however small. Remember that the journey of grieving is healthier when shared with others.

“ Every part of you grieves – your body, feelings, interactions, beliefs, thoughts and actions. Grief is a very personal process as well as a journey of health and recovery.”

“Soul pain and broken hearts do not heal in days, weeks, or months.”

Jody Guylay, RN, LCSW, PhD

Eight or more months after a death

During this period you will probably begin to experience more good days than bad. Remember, however, that the grieving process takes many months and is exhausting work. To help you through this time, make sure that you exercise regularly, eat nutritious food and get adequate rest. Continue to turn to family, friends and professionals for supportive conversation. Difficult periods will come and go; it is important to understand that this is normal. As you continue to heal, you will find renewed energy to go forward with the future.

After two or more years

No matter how long it's been since your loss, your heart will always carry grief. Most grieving people agree that it takes at least two years to establish new routines, create a different lifestyle and realize a new identity.

The employees at Spectrum Health Hospice hope this information is helpful as you move through this difficult time. If you have questions or concerns you may contact us any time.

Contact us

Spectrum Health Hospice

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spectrumhealth.org/hospice

Holidays, birthdays and anniversaries

Even if you are not consciously keeping track, special dates may present challenges to you – especially during the first year or two. These events may remind you of the times you spent together and remind you of your loss. Even if you have been doing well by the end of the first year, you may be surprised about how intensely the one-year anniversary of death affects you.