



# The Grieving Process

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## Next Steps

**1.800.233.1708 | [www.hospice.org](http://www.hospice.org)**

Belleville Location 618-235-1703 • Marion Location 618-997-3030  
Edwardsville Location Hospice Home 618-659-7900



*Hospice of Southern Illinois is your  
community not-for-profit hospice.*

*This booklet was compiled by the staff of  
**Hospice of Southern Illinois***

*Shortly after the death of a loved one there is the hustle and bustle of family and friends. After the funeral, when friends and family have gone back to their daily routine, suddenly you are alone and life may seem to have lost its meaning.*

*At times you may feel as if you are losing your mind. You may “see” the deceased or “hear” them call your name. You may cry at nothing and laugh at anything. You may want to stay away from others.*

*You may love and hate the one who has died. You may develop pains and experience a general feeling of weakness. You may have feelings of suffocation. You may feel a lot of self-pity. You may even wish you were dead. These things, and more, are the threads of separation—the work of saying goodbye to your loved one.*

*No one is immune to death. It is as certain as the rain and the separation is as final as yesterday. Although this may make you feel anxious and insecure about the future, death gives new meaning to life—and life goes on.*

*This booklet is designed to further explain grief and give suggestions of what you can do to understand your grief. Each explanation and suggestion is a generalization that you may or may not experience. Your grief is as unique to you as you are a unique individual. Through this booklet we hope to also encourage you to express your grief in your own special way.*

**Hospice of Southern Illinois**  
*Your Community Not-For-Profit Hospice*

# What is Grief?

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Grief is a unique and natural response to loss. Grief is as normal as playing, laughing, crying, and sleeping. It can be one way of saying, “I love you.” Or it can be a way of saying, “I’m sorry for all of the things I didn’t say and do.”

We experience losses as a normal part of our lives. Life experiences such as moving, going away to school or joining the military all contain some form of loss. Loss is also a part of death. We call our “response to loss” grieving. Grief, the natural response to the loss of that which is meaningful to us, is a deeply human emotion. All people who suffer the loss of someone near to them must sooner or later go through a grieving process. Besides being an emotional response, grief can also be expressed physically, intellectually, socially and spiritually.

When death comes to someone you love, even though you may have expected it, you may be totally shocked. Perhaps you are angry with yourself; perhaps you are angry with God; perhaps you are angry at life itself. Life seems unfair and meaningless. You are sometimes numb and seem to have no feelings. At other times self-pity, anger, anxiety, and guilt overwhelm you. But there is a point where you again find meaning for your life— new meaning in love for others, your job, your family, your friends. Everyone’s response to grief is very difficult. Also Men and women often grieve differently. Some process their grief emotionally and others physically. There are steps you can take which will empower you to work through the grief process. Grieving is a normal and necessary healing process. Your loved one is gone, but you are still here. Life is not over for you. You still have a future.

## Physical Responses to Loss

1. Feel tightness in the throat/heaviness in the chest
2. Have an empty feeling in the stomach/loss of appetite
3. Sense of loved one's presence, as in expecting the person to walk in the door at the usual time
4. Wander aimlessly, forget and neglect to finish things started around the house
5. Have difficulty sleeping/dream of loved one frequently
6. Cry at unexpected times

### What to Do:

- **Eat well.** Grief stresses the body. You need good nourishment now more than ever, so get back to a good diet soon. Vitamin and mineral supplements may help.
- **Exercise regularly.** Exercise lightens the load through biochemical changes. It also helps you to sleep better. A long walk every day is ideal for many people.
- **Nurture yourself.** Each day try to do something good for yourself. Think of what you might do for someone else if they were in your shoes and then do that favor for yourself.
- **Give yourself some time.** With time some of the physical responses diminish or disappear. Change doesn't occur overnight.
- **See your physician.** Although grief is not an illness, your body may be significantly drained of its energy making you more susceptible to illnesses. It is a good idea to have a regular check-up with your doctor.

## **Emotional Responses to Loss**

1. Feel shock and numb as though functioning on auto-pilot
2. Feel great sadness beyond expression
3. Feel guilty at times and angry at others
4. Feel guilty/angry over things that happened/didn't happen in the relationship with the deceased
5. Feel intensely angry at the loved one for leaving
6. Feel mood changes over the slightest things
7. Feel as though feelings are abnormal and overwhelming

## **What to Do:**

- **Accept the grief.** It hurts. Do not try to be brave. Take time to cry.
- **Talk about your loss.** Share your grief within the family. Do not try to protect them by silence. Also find a friend to talk to. Talk often. If the friend tells you to “snap out of it,” find another friend.
- **Deal with guilt, real or imagined.** You did the best you could at the time. If you made mistakes, accept the fact that you, like everyone else, are not perfect. If you continue to blame yourself, consider professional or spiritual counseling.
- **Record your feelings in a journal.** Writing helps you get your feelings out. It also shows your progress.
- **Share your feelings.** You will find that others may share similar feelings as you.

## Social Responses to Loss

1. Discourage visitors and want to be alone
2. Need to tell/retell/remember things about the loved one and the experience of his/her death
3. Feel isolated and alone like no one understands
4. Feel a need to take care of other people who seem uncomfortable around you by politely not talking about your loss
5. What used to be routine and fun activities are now awkward and lack their usual enjoyment
6. Feel uncomfortable, like a fifth wheel, when out with friends
7. Friends may avoid you and your situation because they don't know what to say or do

### What to Do:

- **Memorialize and ritualize your grief.** Making memories helps us work through the pain. Do something special to remember your loved one.
- **Join a group of others who are sorrowing.** Your old circle of friends may change. Even if it does not, you will need new friends who can understand your experience.
- **Associate with old friends also.** Some will be uneasy, but they will get over it. If and when you can, talk and act naturally, without avoiding the subject of your loss.
- **Take the initiative.** Make the attempt to try something new, or do something you used to do before your loved one died. Don't be afraid to accept the invitation of a friend.

## **Intellectual Responses to Loss**

1. Feel restless and look for activity, but find it difficult to concentrate
2. Feel as though the loss isn't real, that it didn't really happen
3. Experience an intense pre-occupation with the life of the deceased
4. Feel as though thoughts are abnormal and overwhelming

### **What to Do:**

- Keep busy. Do work that has a purpose. Use your mind.
- Postpone major decisions. Wait before deciding whether or not to sell your house or to change jobs.
- Record your thoughts in a journal. Writing helps you get your thoughts out. It also shows your progress.
- Read this booklet. Growing in knowledge about grief helps to understand thoughts and feelings.
- Acknowledge your loss. Make adjustments to your new environment without your loved one. Make your space your own and be comfortable with it.

## **Spiritual Responses to Loss**

1. Feel anger at God for allowing this to happen
2. Feel a loss of hope and faith like you cannot go on
3. Drawn closer to your spirituality as a source of strength and hope
4. Gain an appreciation of life and love in the here and now

### **What to Do:**

- Meditate and/or pray. Times of reflection help to review the past and find peace. These times can be used as a relaxation tool to relieve stress.
- Turn grief into creative energy. Find a way to help others— sharing someone else's load will lighten your own. Write something as a tribute to your loved one.
- Read a favorite scripture or quote. Posting these notes can encourage and strengthen us. Memorizing special phrases can be daily reminders of love and joy.
- Take advantage of a religious affiliation. If you have been inactive, this might be the time to become involved again. For some people, grief opens the door to faith. After a time, you might not be as angry with God as you once were.

# Children and Grief

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*“Remember, any child old enough to love is old enough to mourn... With our love and attention, they will learn to understand their loss and grow to be emotionally healthy children, adolescents and adults.” -Dr. Alan Wolfelt*

Children also grieve. Their grief is very similar to adults. One of the few differences is that they grieve according to their developmental stage. This does not mean that children at certain ages cannot understand death and loss. All children can understand loss. Toddlers understand loss when a toy is taken from them, and teenagers understand loss when they are grounded. The difference with children is their ability to associate meaning to a death. A child may have had a pet that died and “went to heaven.” The death of a loved one may be associated in the same way. Association must be carefully considered. One, such as the loved one “went to sleep,” may scare the child into not wanting to go to sleep rather than comfort them.

Children need to see adults grieve. Children constantly learn by example. If the adults in their lives act brave around them, children will do the same. By putting on this act, they will believe that there is something wrong with their real feelings. Their intense feelings of loss are still there without the freedom to express them. However, adults should not burden children with the responsibility of being their consoler. In this case a child may feel the need to be brave, deny their grief, and support their parent or significant adult.

Children are resilient. Do not be afraid to approach a child and invite them to be a part of the rituals and grief of the family. Just like adults, children can find comfort in mementos of their loved one, and they can release their feelings through talking, writing, and drawing.

- **Honestly share information** about the death with children, and give them opportunities to ask the tough questions.
- **Be simple, straightforward and repetitious** in explanations. Children are not trying to be annoying when asking tough questions all of the time. They simply need a little more time and understanding to figure out death.
- **Allow children the choice** of how much they would like to be involved in the family gatherings, decision making and rituals.
- **Be supportive and reassuring** of their feelings and thoughts of the death. Reassure them of their future and about being taken care of.
- **Encourage children to be children.** Children may try to take on more adult responsibility than necessary because they feel obligated to do so.
- **Don't forget those hugs.** Physical contact is an important reassurance of love and gives children the sense of still being included.
- **Children need their usual routine and discipline.** Readjusting to the loss of a loved one is difficult, but is made simpler with as few changes as possible. This reassures children of continued love and stability.

# Complicated Grief

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*“My life was suddenly divided into BEFORE and AFTER, and there was no going back to BEFORE. But then I realized I had a choice to live the AFTER. I had to decide.” -Brenda Neal*

There are some people whose intense grief never goes away or diminishes. After a significant period of time of experiencing this intense grief it may be time to seek professional help. Do not allow crippling grief to continue. There comes a time to stop crying and to live again. Sometimes just a few sessions with a trained counselor will help.

## Signs and Signals of Complicated Grief

All of these warning signs contain elements of healthy grief reactions. Problems are a matter of intensity, elapsed time since the loss, and the degree to which the behavior represents a threat to health, life, functioning or goal attainment.

- **Minimal or total lack of emotional expression regarding the loss.** Grieving is absent, delayed or inhibited. Conduct may be wooden and formal.
- **Prolonged inability to recognize that the loss has happened.** This includes living in the past as if the loss had not occurred, or an extreme attachment to some object that is used to replace or represent the deceased so that the loss can be denied and the one lost can be “kept alive.”
- **Extreme reactions of grief, usually anger or guilt, that persist over time.** These outward or inward protests divert or distort grief so that no real mourning or healing occurs.
- **Marked or gradual change in health status.** This includes increased complaints or symptoms of ill health, development of psychosomatic illness and in some cases the symptoms identified with the deceased person’s last illness.
- **Prolonged depression with tension, agitation, insomnia and feelings of worthlessness and self-blame.** A lowered energy level and withdrawal from social and other activities usually accompany this.
- **Over activity without a sense of loss.** Being busy all of the time without taking the time to feel or think through grief is an act of denial.

# Helping Yourself

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- **Seek and Accept Support.** You need acceptance and caring throughout. If you lack support, make finding it your first priority. Start with family, friends or clergy . . . or call Hospice of Southern Illinois.
- **Accept Your Grief.** Time alone does not heal grief. To work through it, you must accept and deal with it. Remember it is a natural healing process. Roll with its tides.
- **Find Models.** You may need evidence that survival and growth are possible. Look for someone who can give you this hope. Books and support groups may be good places to begin.
- **Learn About Grief.** Many people who have learned about grief have declared . . . “I found out I’m not crazy, I’m grieving.” Understanding grief can make it less fearful and more predictable.
- **Express Your Grief.** Without expression, grief can leave you frozen and stoic. Find someone to listen to your story . . . again and again. You may also want to express it privately through art, poetry or a journal.
- **Accept Your Feelings.** Grief has many feelings . . . some very intense. Accept them and they will help you learn about yourself and the meaning of your loss. Lock them up inside you and you will lose parts of yourself.

- **Pace Yourself. Grief takes energy.** You may tire easily. A slower pace alternated with periods of diversion and mild exercise will maximize healing. So will good nutrition.
- **Involve Yourself In Work or Meaningful Activity.** It can help you maintain direction, control and purpose and occupy your mind.
- **Trust Your Own Sense of Timing.** You will know when it is time to sort through personal belongings, give mementos to family and friends and begin moving in new directions.
- **Don't Be Afraid To Have Fun.** Laughter is good medicine. Allow yourself opportunities for diversion and freshness. Children and pets are great providers of healing.
- **You've Got To Have Hope.** Faith is not the absence of fear, but the willingness to go on when fear is present. There is a time to take the next steps. Healing will come, with time.

# Hospice of Southern Illinois

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Hospice of Southern Illinois is available to help you with your grief. For twelve months following your loved one's death, you will receive mailings and/or phone calls to inquire about your progress. These contacts are generally made every three months.

If, at any time, you feel the need to talk with someone about your loss, please call **1-800-233-1708**. Hospice of Southern Illinois can provide support, resources and education on grief and the grief process.

- *Hospice of Southern Illinois* is the largest not-for-profit organization providing hospice services in 27 counties in Southern Illinois since 1981.
- Annually over 1,400 patients and families are provided with care from the ages of birth to over 100.
- More than 500 hospice trained volunteers helping patients and families, as well as the clinical and administrative teams.
- Setting the bar for hospice care, Hospice of Southern Illinois has a reputation for providing excellent end-of-life care and comprehensive services including a team of physicians, nurses, hospice aides, social workers, spiritual/bereavement counselors, volunteers and administrative staff.
- Services are provided 24 hours a day/7 days a week.
- Hospice care is physician directed and registered nurses are highly trained and many have passed the national boards and are certified in nursing for hospice and palliative care.
- *Hospice of Southern Illinois* provides bereavement services for family members up to thirteen months after death.
- Opened the first and only Hospice Home, *Relais Bonne Eau*, in Southern Illinois.
- Proud member of We Honor Veterans partnership.
- Free phone app with hospice criteria information, end-of-life resources, memorial slideshow functionality, and more.

*The mission of Hospice of Southern Illinois is to enhance the quality of life for individuals and their loved ones touched by a terminal illness.*

*“The joyous creation of a time and space shared in love is both delicate and indestructible. Death clumsily ransacks this holy place where two people have loved, but can never reach their inner sanctum.” - Molly Fumia*



# Other Resources for Caregivers on the Web Are:

**[www.caringbridge.org](http://www.caringbridge.org)**

Online Community for Friends and  
Family Together During Health  
Journeys

**[www.aarp.org/griefandloss](http://www.aarp.org/griefandloss)**

AARP – American Association of  
Retired Persons

**[www.griefnet.org](http://www.griefnet.org)**

Internet Community of People  
Dealing with Grief, Death, and  
Major Loss

**[www.griefrecovery.com](http://www.griefrecovery.com)**

Grief Share – Your Journey from  
Mourning to Joy

**[www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)**

The Dougy Center for Grieving  
Children and Families

**[www.grief.com](http://www.grief.com)**

Because Love Never Dies



*Your Community Not-For-Profit Hospice*

Our mission is to enhance the quality  
of life for individuals and their loved  
ones touched by a terminal illness.



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## **Belleville Location**

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Belleville, IL 62220  
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## **Marion Location**

204 Halfway Road  
Marion, IL 62959  
618-997-3030

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## **Edwardsville Location**

7325 Marine Road  
Edwardsville, IL 62025  
Hospice Home, *Relais Bonne Eau*  
618-659-7900

**1.800.233.1708 | [www.hospice.org](http://www.hospice.org)**

