

## PARENTS CORNER

### Children and Emotions

If a group of grieving children were asked to list their feelings in the first hour after hearing about a death, the list might include shock, disbelief, anger, sadness, relief, devastation, fear, loneliness, weirdness or guilt. These feelings are similar to what adults may feel but, because of their youth, children understand and deal with their feelings in ways that may be different from adults.

Children grieve intermittently. All the various feelings experienced in the first hour after hearing about a death may recur throughout their mourning process. These feelings can appear mysteriously and often suddenly. It is important to help children know that these intense feelings will neither destroy them nor last forever.

Children don't have a good understanding of their emotions and are often wary of feelings that leave them vulnerable. The softer feelings, such as sadness, loneliness, fear and guilt, are often covered up or protected by silliness or anger. Persistent avoidance of these emotions may signal a need for professional help.

Children often use anger as protection against vulnerability, but when they suffer a loss, anger is often the primary, real and legitimate emotion. They may be angry with God, at other survivors or those who haven't suffered such a loss. Children may even become angry at the deceased, which is hard to accept and even harder to share. This may cause them to turn their anger inward, resulting in feelings of guilt or depression. Or they may turn their anger onto others, which may lead to fights at school.

Children may be angry at all the family changes that occur following a death. They may be angry from feeling different or isolated, or tired of pondering the "why me?" question. Children may resent a parent having to go to work, or moving to a new city or a new school.

**Some children perceive sadness as an invisible scar that can't be shared.**

Sadness in children may be identified by withdrawal, crying, lack of concentration in school or a sense of emptiness. Some children perceive sadness as an invisible scar that can't be shared. Fear and anxiety show themselves in many ways, including overeating or not eating, sleep disturbances, wanting to sleep with a parent or sibling, or nightmares.



If the deceased went through a long and painful dying process, had been mentally ill or abusive, or if there was ambivalence in the relationship, children may normally feel relieved after the death. They may be ashamed of this feeling, so it's important to help them understand that feeling relieved is normal.

When emotions are not dealt with in a safe, caring environment that honors the child's feelings, problems may develop. Some children push their feelings down to please those around them. These children may seem fine, do well in school and not have any serious behavior problems; however, their stress may cause physical illnesses such as vomiting, diarrhea or headaches that a doctor cannot otherwise explain.

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**SHARP** Hospice  
Care

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ISSUE **08**

**"Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."**  
— Reinhold Niebuhr

*bringing comfort to each day*

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## Healing Through Grief

*Dear Friend,*

Coping with the death of a loved one can cause a tremendous shock to your body, including your immune system. Maintaining your health during the grieving process requires particular attention, as your body's natural defenses may be weakened by the stress of the situation. This issue provides helpful information on how to manage and treat the physical reactions to grieving.

We're here to help. If you would like to talk about your loss, reactions or concerns, or if you have any questions about our services, please call 1-800-681-9188 to speak to a bereavement counselor.

Sincerely yours,  
The Bereavement Department of  
Sharp HospiceCare



*Taking Care of Yourself*

Most people have a fairly good idea of how to take care of themselves and the importance of good nutrition, exercise and getting plenty of rest. But, as the mind navigates through the various stages of grief, it can sometimes leave you physically drained and lacking the desire to take care of your body. Ignoring what your body needs may seem like the easiest way to cope, but it may be detrimental to your health and well-being.

Following these steps will help you prevent or treat some of the physical reactions to grief:

- Watch for significant weight loss or gain. Consult a doctor if this occurs.
- Avoid junk food and alcohol, or consume them in small quantities.
- Attempt to eat a well-balanced diet.
- Drink plenty of water throughout the day.
- Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.
- Exercise for at least 25 minutes every other day to increase your energy level. Make sure to consult with your doctor before beginning an exercise program.
- Ask friends and family for help with completing daily tasks.
- Schedule a physical exam with your doctor to monitor your physical condition.
- Feed your spirit through deep breathing, listening to peaceful music, meditation, prayer, nature walks or finding something you are grateful for each day.

The time will come when you will be able to turn to yourself with love and offer yourself the care you need and deserve. Just remember, it is a different time frame for each individual.

Sharp HospiceCare strives to bring comfort to those working through the grieving process. Bereavement counselors provide a supportive, confidential environment for families and friends dealing with the loss of a loved one. To learn more about Sharp HospiceCare, including support groups, call 1-800-681-9188.

## Health and Grieving: The Physical Impact of Emotions



### Emotional Release Can Be Learned

Every individual expresses, acknowledges and experiences emotions differently. Some may express their emotions dramatically and openly, while others may do so quietly and in private. Individuals who have difficulty acknowledging and expressing painful emotions may have learned to ignore these emotions, preventing them from experiencing the emotional releases needed to eventually move on.

Releasing painful emotions may gradually free people to experience joy and love — emotions which can strengthen their immune system.

It is possible to learn how to acknowledge your emotions, which helps in the healing process of grief. Remember, there are no right or wrong feelings; expressing the emotional reactions of your grief is one of the most important ways to relieve stress and clear your mind. Talking with others, journaling and engaging in hobbies and other activities that nourish you help increase the healing process. It is also OK to seek the assistance of a friend or counselor.

Those who are able to face their emotions and grief not only become richer and deeper, but more open to love, joy and even sorrow.

### Emotional Release Can Be Good Medicine

The body's endocrine, nervous and immune systems are connected, resulting in emotions, thoughts and physical resilience becoming interdependent of each other. For many bereaved people, expressing and sharing the intensely painful emotions of grief can provide relief and allow periods of calm. Without this release, bereaved people are more vulnerable to long periods of depression or anxiety, which can weaken the immune system.

Research demonstrates a connection between the endocrine, nervous and immune systems, showing how our emotions, thoughts and physical resilience are profoundly interdependent.

## Loss Can Be Hazardous to Your Health

Research shows that companionship and social support can help protect bereaved people from illnesses that may be related to feelings of vulnerability during the grieving process. Reaching out is difficult for almost anyone; whether you call a Sharp HospiceCare bereavement counselor, or attend a church service or support group for the first time, it requires courage and energy.

### Your Support System

How can you find a way to make reaching out possible? Here are a few suggestions that can help you move in that direction once you are ready:

- Make a list of ideas for meeting new people. Include anything that comes to mind.
- If you believe in prayer, ask for the guidance, courage and energy to reach out for support.
- Be open to opportunities, such as an invitation to spend time with friends and family.
- Consider whether you already know someone you would like to know better.
- Give yourself permission to accept the support of others as a way to help your healing process. When you allow others to help you, they also feel better by making a difference.
- Set achievable goals that fulfill your needs so that you can succeed by doing your part, no matter how others respond to you.
- Be gentle and patient with yourself.

Joining a bereavement group also offers you support and can help you understand how normal your feelings are. As group members listen to others and share their own experiences, they gain new coping tools and an opportunity to learn more about the grieving process itself.



Sharp HospiceCare offers free support groups for people who have lost a loved one. For more information or to register, please call us at 1-800-681-9188 or visit [sharp.com](http://sharp.com) (search for "bereavement support groups").

## Complicated Grief and Its Impact on Health

Complicated grief interferes with a person's ability to grieve effectively, impacting his or her needs, normal routine, well-being or relationships. Signs of complicated grief include an inability to accept that death has occurred; frequent nightmares and intrusive memories; withdrawal from social contact; and constant yearning for the deceased. Complicated grief is more common when dealing with a suicide or other traumatic death.

If the pain of the loss is so constant and severe that it keeps you from resuming your life, you may be suffering from a condition known as complicated grief.

Left untreated, complicated grief and depression can lead to significant emotional damage, life-threatening health problems and even suicide. But treatment can help you get better.

Contact a grief counselor or professional therapist if you:

- Feel like life isn't worth living
- Wish you had died with your loved one
- Blame yourself for the loss or for failing to prevent it
- Feel numb and disconnected from others for more than a few weeks
- Are having difficulty trusting others since your loss
- Are unable to perform your normal daily activities

Regardless of whether or not you think you are experiencing complicated grief, keep in mind that it is important to get regular checkups with your doctor. As a bereaved individual, the stress of grief can sometimes create changes in health, and your doctor can help you manage these changes. Your doctor will be able to identify or rule out any other causes for your symptoms that may not be related to grief — such as physical conditions or mental illness.

Sometimes mourning is delayed because of concurrent crises taking place.

