

# Thoughts and Feelings

“Grief is hard. It does get better, although not always as quickly as we would like.”

—Stephanie Eckhaus, LCSW

## Musings from Daughters Grieving Their Mothers

- There is power in being able to tell a story to people who understand and will simply listen without trying to “fix” things.
- Grief is hard. Sometimes we need a “pass” to give ourselves permission to grieve as long as we need.
- When we lose a parent we become the person in charge of taking care of the child inside us.
- Grieving can be lonely. Our siblings and other family members might grieve differently and not understand us.
- Sometimes sorting out the “stuff” is not about the “stuff.” We may not have the same timetable as our siblings for cleaning out the closets and packing up the house. Material possessions can represent a strong connection to our loved one. This may cause tension in a family.
- Grief attacks are painful and inconvenient. Feelings of grief can come with a song, memory, or date.
- It does get better, although not always as quickly as we would like.
- Sometimes being grown up is not all it was cracked up to be.
- For those who had the type of mom who loved unconditionally, who put our needs before her own and whom we could ask for help without it ever feeling like a favor, there is no substitute. She will leave a deep hole in our hearts and the world will feel less secure when she isn’t in it.

—Stephanie Eckhaus, LCSW, Kaiser Permanente

## Loneliness

For many people, loneliness is the most difficult part of bereavement. This is particularly true for people who lose a partner they have lived with for years. According to Therese A. Rando, PhD, the sense of being incomplete can be devastating. “As a result,” she says, “some people rush too quickly into new relationships in an attempt to compensate for their loss. However, it is equally important to take enough time to grieve and adjust before you focus on new relationships.”

People who lose a spouse at a younger age may face a different set of concerns. You may be raising children on your own and grieving with them. You may need to find support for your children to help them cope with the loss of a parent. We are here to help you. Talk to a Bereavement Coordinator. Ask us about local support groups.

One way to feel less lonely is to be around people. Try:

- Joining a support group
- Spending time with a thoughtful friend
- Going out to a book store, shopping mall, or social event

Loneliness is a natural result of missing the person you love. Your loved one held a unique and important place in your life. You can never replace that. However, with time you will find a new rhythm. This may be hard to imagine immediately after a loved one's death. Loneliness will decrease as your life fills with new experiences.

—Amy Dunphy, MPH, Kaiser Permanente

## Loneliness and Solitude in Grief

If you are among those traveling the winding path of grief, you're probably quite familiar with both sides of being alone: loneliness and solitude.

With an overwhelming sense of missing the one you love comes the crushing awareness of all that you have lost. You'd give anything to be together again, if only long enough to be relieved of your loneliness and to be reassured that your loved one is still a part of your life.

At other times you may feel a need for solitude. You'll want to be by yourself and withdraw from the pressures of daily life. This desire to turn inward and to reflect on your loss is normal. Don't be afraid to get in touch with your innermost feelings. It can be helpful to find your tears and figure out where you are going from here.

## Isolation from Others

Often, the bereaved feel isolated from the rest of the world. There are many reasons for this:

- Many people are uncomfortable with death. Few of us know how to cope with the pain of loss and grief. We discourage others from expressing sorrow so we don't feel uncomfortable.
- You may be embarrassed or ashamed to let your emotions show. As a child you may have learned to control your feelings and grieve alone. As an adult you may equate grieving with self-indulgence or self-pity.

- You may feel different and apart from everyone else. You may feel stunned that other people go about their business, totally unaware that your entire life has been turned upside down.
- It's hard to ask for help. You may worry that others won't know what to say.
- It hurts when people say the wrong thing. Many people resort to platitudes or clichés or change the subject. Despite their good intentions, grieving people may feel hurt by comments such as "It was God's will;" "I know how you feel;" "Life must go on" or "At least he had a good life."



- Other people want you to move on. Some people may be done with your grieving long before you are. They may express concern that you are "hanging on" to your grief. They may change the subject or avoid any mention of your loved one's name.

Suggestions for coping with loneliness and isolation:

- Find people who really support you. Who is comfortable listening to you talk about your grief? Find people who don't judge you, or have suffered a similar loss.
- Find time with others to talk and receive support. Be honest about what you're feeling. Allow yourself to express your sadness rather than masking it.
- Don't expect others to guess what you need. When you want to be touched, held, hugged, listened to, or pampered, say so. If all you want from others is help with simple errands, tasks, and repairs, say so.
- Let others (especially children) know if and when you need to be alone, so they won't feel rejected.
- Cry as often as you wish. You have every right to miss the person who has died. Accept your feelings as normal.
- Find time alone to process what's happened: to remember, to dream, and to think.

- Identify your loneliest times, and think of how you can alter your routines and environment. If preparing meals alone triggers sadness, you might microwave quick, easy meals instead. Plan weekends ahead of time so you know you'll be busy. Rearrange furniture in a room you used to share.
- Be patient with people who don't understand. Many people have yet to experience a significant loss, so they don't know what grief feels like. This affects how they respond to you and what they say. They aren't deliberately trying to hurt you. You can choose to deal with such people. You might even try to enlighten them about what you know of grief. Alternatively, you can spend time with those who understand the support you need.
- Realize that no one can totally understand the relationship you had with your loved one.
- Ask people to remember, talk about, and share stories of your loved one.
- Become more aware of how the words you use affect other people. Rather than saying something hurtful, admit that you don't know what to say.

- Consider getting a companion animal. A pet can be a wonderful source of unconditional love. Make sure you consider the kind of pet that would suit you and your lifestyle.

—Marty Tousley, RN, MS, Grief Counselor  
Adapted with permission from,  
*"Loneliness and Solitude in Grief"*

“Grief is not a disorder, a disease or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical, and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is to grieve.”

—Earl Grollman



This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult your doctor.

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