

## AGING & DISABILITY RESOURCES

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### Responses to Grief

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Grief causes tremendous turmoil in every aspect of life and involves a wide range of physical, emotional, and spiritual responses. Many people find themselves overwhelmed and frightened by the feelings, thoughts and emotions.

Following are stages of grief from Kubler-Ross and Robert Kavanaugh. These stages are part of the natural healing process necessary in recovery from any loss no matter how large or small.

| <b>Kubler-Ross</b> | <b>Robert Kavanaugh</b>         |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Shock              | Shock, Denial                   |
| Denial             | Disorganization                 |
| Anger              | Volatile Emotions               |
| Bargaining         | Guilt                           |
| Depression         | Loss and Loneliness             |
| Acceptance         | Relief                          |
|                    | Reestablishment, Reorganization |

The following common characteristics considered normal, but will vary person to person.

#### Physical

Reactions to grief can cause physical symptoms. Our bodies sense the emotional loss. Many older people will physically hurt rather than complain of emotional pain.

- ❖ Knot in stomach
- ❖ Changes in appetite
- ❖ Tightness or lump in throat
- ❖ Frequent sighing
- ❖ Shortness of breath
- ❖ Tightness in chest
- ❖ Fatigue or lack of energy
- ❖ Muscle weakness
- ❖ Dry mouth
- ❖ Nausea, diarrhea, indigestion
- ❖ Feeling "hollow"
- ❖ Feeling weak or faint
- ❖ Headaches
- ❖ General achiness
- ❖ Over-sensitivity to noise

## Behavioral

- ❖ Being immobilized or unable to act
- ❖ Restless over activity (unable to sit still)
- ❖ Forgetfulness
- ❖ Sleeplessness or oversleeping
- ❖ Lack of motivation or energy
- ❖ Unable to begin and maintain normal daily activity
- ❖ Crying or sobbing at unexpected times
- ❖ Talking to the person who has died
- ❖ Social withdrawal

## Feelings

- ❖ Shock, numbness, disbelief, anxiety, panic, anger, guilt, intense sadness

## Things to remember in dealing with your grief:

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- ❖ Verbalize your feelings associated with your loss.
- ❖ Tell the story of the loss.
- ❖ Read books.
- ❖ Write a letter to your lost loved one describing how you feel. Read that letter to a friend or counselor.
- ❖ Write about your loss with a special focus on the last contact with the person.
- ❖ Keep a daily grief journal.
- ❖ List ways that avoidance of grieving has negatively impacted your life.
- ❖ See your doctor to keep in good health.
- ❖ Watch your finances, as you are vulnerable at this time. Seek counseling from a financial planner if needed.
- ❖ Don't make any major changes/decisions until a year has passed following the death.
- ❖ Remember that the low periods will gradually decrease in intensity and frequency, and that you will begin to feel better in a few months.

*\*Excerpt from "Loss and Grief in Later Life" by V.L. Schmall, A Pacific NW Extension Publication*