

# Common Reactions in the Grief Process



A HOME FOR THE GRIEVING

## Physical Changes:

Appetite – loss or increase  
Breathing Difficulties  
    ~ hyperventilation  
    ~ shortness of breath  
Chest tightness  
Dizziness or fainting spells  
Dry mouth  
Fatigue  
GI upset  
    ~ constipation  
    ~ diarrhea  
    ~ nausea  
Cold hands  
Headaches  
Hives, rash, itching  
Indigestion  
Insomnia – sleep changes  
Low resistance to infection  
Minor illnesses  
Muscle tightness  
    ~ face, jaws, back of neck, shoulders  
Numb or tingling extremities  
Pounding or rapid heart beat  
Pale skin or rashes  
Sleep too much  
Sleep too little  
Sighing  
Speech slowed, stuttering  
Stomach butterflies  
Sweating  
Tearfulness  
Trembling  
Urinating frequently  
Vomiting – dry heaves  
Weakness – especially in legs  
Weight gain or loss

## Behavioral Changes:

Accident proneness  
Absent-mindedness  
Fingernail biting

Grinding of teeth  
Hair twisting  
Hyper mobility  
Nightmares  
Searching or calling out  
Treasuring objects of the deceased

## Flare Ups of:

Allergies  
Arthritis  
Asthma  
Colitis  
Herpes  
    ~ canker sores  
    ~ cold sores  
Migraines  
Illnesses

## Emotional or Social Changes

Ambivalence  
Agitation  
Anger or angry outbursts  
Anxiousness  
Blaming others  
Critical of self  
Crying  
Emancipation  
Depression  
Dread  
Fear of groups or crowds  
Fears in general  
Guilt feelings  
Helplessness  
Hyper excitability  
Impulsive behavior  
Indecisive  
Irritability  
Isolation  
Jealousy  
Loneliness  
Loss of interest in living

Loss of self-esteem  
Moodiness or mood swings  
Relief  
Restlessness  
Sadness  
Suspiciousness  
Withdrawal from relationships  
Worthlessness  
Yearning

## Intellectual Changes:

Concentration difficulties  
Confusion  
Disbelief  
Errors:  
    ~ judging distance  
    ~ grammar  
    ~ pronunciation  
    ~ use of numbers  
Fantasy life increased or decreased  
Lack of attention to details  
Lack of awareness  
Loss of creativity  
Loss of productivity  
Mental blocking  
Over-attention to details  
Past oriented rather than present or future  
Preoccupation with the deceased  
Worrying about everything

## Spiritual Changes:

Angry with God  
Increased interest in spirituality  
Difficulty attending church  
Preoccupied with eternal life  
Loss of interest in living  
Feelings of being punished  
Finding peace and strength in one's faith

## Beyond Surviving: Suggestions for Survivors

Iris M. Bolton

1. Know you can survive; you may not think so, but you can.
2. Struggle with "why" it happened until you no longer need to know "why" or until YOU are satisfied with partial answers.
3. Know you may feel overwhelmed by the intensity of your feelings but that all your feelings are normal.
4. Anger, guilt, confusion, forgetfulness are common responses. You are not crazy, you are in mourning.
5. Be aware you may feel appropriate anger at the person, at the world, at God, at yourself. It's okay to express it.
6. You may feel guilty for what you think you did or did not do. Guilt can turn into regret, through forgiveness.
7. Having suicidal thoughts is common. It does not mean that you will act on those thoughts.
8. Remember to take one moment or one day at a time.
9. Find a good listener with whom to share. Call someone if you need to talk.
10. Don't be afraid to cry. Tears are healing.
11. Give yourself time to heal.
12. Remember, the choice was not yours. No one is the sole influence on another's life.
13. Expect setbacks. If emotions return like a tidal wave, you may only be experiencing a remnant of grief, an unfinished piece.
14. Try to put off major decisions.
15. Give yourself permission to get professional help.
16. Be aware of the pain in your family and friends.
17. Be patient with yourself and others who may not understand.
18. Set your own limits and learn to say no.
19. Steer clear of people who want to tell you what or how to feel.
20. Know that there are support groups that can be helpful, such as Compassionate Friends or Survivors of Suicide groups. If not, ask a professional to start one.
21. Call on your personal faith to help you through.
22. It is common to experience physical reaction to your grief, e.g. headaches, loss of appetite, inability to sleep.
23. The willingness to laugh with other and at yourself is healing.
24. Wear out your questions, anger, guilt, or other feelings until you can let them go. Letting go doesn't mean forgetting.
25. Know that you will never be the same again, but you can survive and even go beyond just surviving.

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